

Bartholomew Kneeland
T W O

S E R M O N S

On the Nature, Extent and Perfection
of the Divine Goodness.

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Delivered December 9. 1762.

BEING THE

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Of the P R O V I N C E, &c.

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K.
By *Jonathan Mayhew*, D. D.

Pastor of the West Church in Boston.

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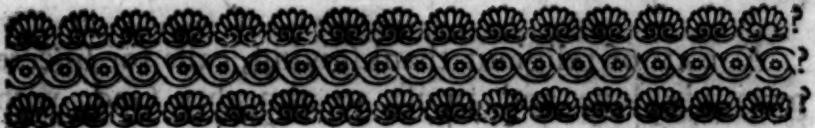
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Of the Extent and Perfection

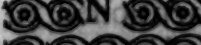


SERMON I.

Of the Nature, Extent and Perfection of GOD's Goodness.

PSALM CXLV. 9.

THE LORD *is good to ALL; and his tender Mercies are over ALL his Works.*

 O great variety either of subject or sentiment, can well be expected in sermons  on these common annual occasions.  A minister who has preached on them steadily twice a-day, in the same place, for fifteen or sixteen years successively, will probably have little or nothing that is new, to gratify the curiosity of his hearers. Neither is this what he ought chiefly to aim at, or they to desire, at any time; particularly not on such occasions as the present.

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A DAY of religious thanksgiving, calls for sincere gratitude, love and praise to almighty God; with hearty resolutions, by his grace assisting, to make a proper return to him for all his benefits & unmerited favors, by obeying his commandments, and living to his glory. The divine GOODNESS is, accordingly, a subject to which One's thoughts ought to be, and are naturally turned, on such occasions. This can never be an unfutable subject, whatever be the more special ground of our thankfulness; since we can enjoy no good, whether public and common, or private and personal; whether pertaining to the present life, or to the future, but what flows from the same eternal and inexhaustible fountain of divine goodness. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* A day of thanksgiving cannot, indeed, be properly observed at any time, unless the meditations of the worshippers are in a great measure, if not principally, employed upon this divine attribute, and the manifestations of it in and towards the works of God.

It is therefore supposed that no apology needs to be made, for the choice of so common a subject or text, as that which I just now mentioned; even tho' I should have formerly discoursed upon the same words, as I may have done, but am uncertain. My method of treating the subject at present, however, will at least be different: Which is mentioned to obviate the prejudices of some persons, who cannot, perhaps, at all relish a sermon the second time, which they might not have wholly disapproved of the first.

LET

* James I. 17.

LET me add, that I have a farther design at present, in the choice of this subject, than merely to lead you to such reflections on the divine goodness, as may be particularly suitable to this occasion. I have it in my view, by God's help, to give you such a representation and idea of his goodness, as ought to be habitual to you; to animate your piety, to support and rejoice your hearts at all times, and to have a powerful influence on your whole lives. Right conceptions, I mean rational and truly scriptural ones, of God's adorable attributes, are the foundation of all true religion. And these conceptions, if, instead of floating in the brain, they sink into the heart, and are formed into a fixed principle there, called FAITH in the language of scripture; are really the *substance* of religion, and not merely the *foundation* of it, as being necessary in order thereto. No man that has these conceptions of, or is thus rightly and habitually affected towards God, as being what he is, can possibly live a wicked life. He will as certainly bring forth good things out of this good treasure in his heart, as a good tree will bear good fruit in the season. And this will be at once delightful to himself, and pleasing and honary to God. We shall then indeed, and not till then, "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ:" Who has himself said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

WHAT has now been observed concerning the attributes of God in general, is very particularly and especially true of his goodness. A scriptural idea or conception of, and a firm faith in it, habitual to the mind, thro' the influences of the Spirit of grace, will be at once the source of great peace and comfort to ourselves, of hope and confidence towards God, of holiness in life, of happiness in death, and like

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“a well of living water within us, springing up into everlasting life :” ‘As our Lord said of “the water which he should give.” Which the evangelist explains by saying, “This he spake of the spirit which they that believe on him should receive.” Let all then, not only believe, but, in the language of scripture, “taste and see, that the Lord is good ;” without fear that they may err by thinking him better, or more extensively good, gracious and merciful than he actually is. This is impossible. For if we can believe those holy men who spake, wrote and prophesied as they were moved by the Holy Ghost ; or, in other words, if we can believe God himself, who “cannot lie,” The LORD is indeed “GOOD to ALL ; and his TENDER MERCIES are over ALL “his works !”—And, surely, no One’s ideas can exceed, no One’s conceptions go beyond, such a goodness and mercy as this ; a goodness, which is itself without measure, without bounds ; eternal, unlimited, immutable goodness ; and a mercy, that is from everlasting to everlasting. Your most exalted ideas will fall far below this goodness. Man that is a worm, tho’ he may have some general and just, can yet have no adequate, no perfect conception of it ; which is true of this, in common with the other attributes of God, which are all infinite ; and therefore not to be comprehended by the highest angels, those heavenly ministers, who, as a flame of fire, do his will with alacrity and ardor, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Canst THOU then, a mortal man, “find out the Almighty unto perfection !” Can thy conceptions rise so high as his goodness ! “It is “as high as heaven, what canst thou do ? Deeper “than hell, what canst thou know ? The measure “thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than “the sea !” *

* Job XL 7, 8, 9.

THAT

THAT the true scriptural doctrine of God's goodness, may be abused and perverted; that there is great danger of this; yea, that it is actually perverted and abused by many, to the most impious and destructive purposes; all this, I say, is very readily allowed. But what follows from hence? that it should not be preached to the world? But why then, preach the gospel to the world? Is not that perverted and abused also? Indeed the gospel itself cannot be preached as it ought to be;—as Jesus Christ and his apostles themselves preached it, without preaching, at the same time, the boundless goodness of God. Wrong inferences from, and perversions of the truth, ought indeed, as far as may be, to be guarded against. But the truth, especially the most important and glorious truths, ought not to be even suppressed, and much less denied, lest bad men should abuse them. The total suppression, at least the denial of them, in those whose business it is to declare the truth, is as criminal, in my opinion, as any perversion of them by their hearers could possibly be. If any will, thro' the wickedness of their hearts, "wrest" this doctrine, as they sometimes also "do the other scriptures," it will be "to their own destruction." But I humbly hope in God, that it will not be to mine, to preach any doctrine contained in his holy word; and particularly this, "That the Lord is good to ALL; and his tender mercies over ALL his works." Which, my honored and beloved hearers, I shall, in his fear, or rather in his love, endeavour more distinctly to explain to you.

It will be proper,

I. To make some observations on the goodness of God in general.

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II. To

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II. To consider the extent and perfection of it, according to the representation in the text : Wherein the LORD is declared to be "GOOD TO ALL," &c.

III. To take a cursory notice of some of the principal objections against the divine goodness. And,

IV. To make some application of the subject, by reminding you of the great goodness of God to Us, both in temporal and spiritual respects ; and by such inferences and reflections, as may at once tend to the honor of God, and shew what influence the consideration of his goodness ought to have upon our hearts and manners.—Let me then,

I. MAKE some observations on the goodness of God in general. And here,

1. By the goodness of God is primarily intended the kindness, benevolence and bounty of his *nature* ; or goodness as it is an attribute, or property, *inherent* in, and *essential* to him. All beings whatsoever, exist after some determinate manner, having certain attributes, qualities or properties inherent in them, which make them to be what they are. This is equally true of all beings without exception, whether animate or inanimate, rational or irrational, created or uncreated. We cannot speak, or think of any particular being or thing, but as it exists, or is supposed to exist, under certain determinate properties, which distinguish it from all others. For no man, surely, can conceive of any thing abstracted from, or stripped of, all its known properties, qualities and attributes ; which are its essence, or all that is known of it. Derived, dependent beings are, indeed, mutable or changeable as to their properties. They may either lose some which they originally had, or receive others which they had not ; and yet, in com-

mon language, remain the *same*. And whatsoever may be thus lost, or acquired, is considered as an *accident*, or a non-essential property, in contradistinction from those which cannot be lost without the destruction of the being itself; and which are therefore called its *essential* properties, as being necessary to its very existence.

BUT in God, of whom we ought ever to think and speak with the profoundest reverence: In God, I say, there is no such distinction, or distribution of attributes, into essential and non-essential. In him nothing, whether power, knowledge or goodness, or any other quality, is accidental or adventitious, acquired or derived from without." "For who hath first given unto him!" All is eternal, all essential, all equally necessary: And nothing that is so, can ever be lost. And if God can neither acquire any property or attribute, which did not originally and necessarily belong to him as part of his essence, nor lose any thing which did, he is of consequence, in the strictest sense, as the scriptures express it, "without variableness, or shadow of turning;"—wholly and absolutely, necessarily and immutably the same, even "from everlasting to everlasting." Accordingly, when God is spoken of as good, the primary meaning is, that he is so in his very nature, or essentially good; as necessarily & essentially good, as he is eternal, wise, powerful or omnipresent: And consequently, equally good at all times, and in all parts of the universe; tho' the appearances, or manifestations of his goodness are, indeed, very various, as they must needs be, if there is a great variety of creatures produced in time, to behold, or to partake of his goodness. But of the extent of God's goodness hereafter: At present it is considered only in general, as one of his essential attributes, or as a property of his nature, equally underived and unalienable; no borrowed or

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precarious excellency, as the goodness of men and angels is in them, but as necessary as his being. Indeed, One need not scruple to call it a *part* of God himself, only as there may be an impropriety in *that manner* of expression concerning the *infinite* God, in all other respects in general: But it is no doubt *as truly* and *as properly* a *part* of him, as any other divine perfection.

2. THE goodness of God comprehends his *beneficence*, or his good and bountiful *acts*, as well as the goodness of his nature. All beings act, at least in general, according to their respective natures, or the qualities inherent in them. And if the great God be supposed to be essentially good, it is hardly, if at all supposeable, that he should not also do good: Tho' to say, it was or is necessary for him to do it, would be an improper way of speaking; since we very seldom, if ever, speak of what is done by choice, or with design, as done necessarily. Be that as it may, still this distinction betwixt the goodness of God in his nature, or as it is an attribute inherent in him, and his goodness as manifested in his works or doings, is by no means an insignificant and unscriptural one, like many others in common use; and more especially with reference to religious subjects, where such trifling is the most inexcusable. "Thou art good," says the royal Psalmist, "and doest good." The same distinction frequently occurs in the holy scriptures. And indeed, what is more natural, than from contemplating goodness in its source, to descend in our thoughts to the apparent effects of it in the works and providence of God? Or, on the other hand, what is more natural, than from considering the effects of divine goodness and mercy, which we either experience or behold, or rather both, to ascend in our imaginations to that fountain of goodness in the divine nature itself, from whence they flow?

It is by what creatures do, that we form the best and surest judgment of their natures, qualities and dispositions respectively. For we have not the faculty of looking immediately at the heart or spirit, and seeing what is therein, as God does, clearly, perfectly, and without the least difficulty : A faculty, however, which some orders of creatures above us, may in a degree be possessed of, tho' not of omniscience. Nay, we know that God has, on certain occasions, endowed even men with this faculty. For the "discerning of spirits" was one of the miraculous powers conferred on the apostles, and, most probably, on some other christians in the apostolic age. But, as was said before, we judge of the internal characters and qualities of other men, chiefly at least by what they do ; by their actions and conduct. And this is one way in which we arrive at the knowledge of the divine goodness. God "doeth good ;" and therefore we justly infer that he "is good," even essentially so. This way of reasoning is at once conclusive and plain, being accommodated to people of all capacities in general. But I am far from saying or thinking, that this is the only method of attaining to the knowledge of God's goodness. On the contrary, the divine goodness admits of strict demonstration, *a priori*, to speak in the language of metaphysicians. And tho' this latter kind of reasoning & proof, is much less adapted to the understandings of people in general, than the former ; yet it has its uses, and is really of vast importance. Yea, in some cases it is much the best, and most convincing, to those who are accustomed to speculations of this nature. So that tho' it is not so proper to be introduced into a common popular discourse, as the other ; yet it is by no means to be given up as unsolid, or inconclusive. Which is what would, to be sure, highly gratify men of a sceptical turn ; who might flatter themselves, that if this argument were out of the way, they could find objections.

jections enough against the visible, apparent works of God, to disprove the essential goodness of his nature, or at least to make others very dubious about it.

THE reason why I do not mention revelation as a strict, proper proof of the divine goodness, is this : That none who believe the scriptures pretend to doubt of it, however wrong their conceptions, in some respects, may be concerning it. And to produce the testimony of scripture in the case, could answer no end with those who disbelieve and deny their authority. It may be added, that whosoever believes any thing to be true, upon the testimony or authority of God speaking in his holy word, presupposes him to be good, and to be before proved so, by arguments of another kind. For veracity, or truth, is certainly one branch of goodness. If God were not good, he might deceive his creatures, and delight therein. He that supposes any thing is actually true, merely because God hath declared it, "hath set to his seal that God is true." He takes it for granted herein, that God himself is a most faithful, and therefore a good being ; not a false or evil One, or One of a justly suspected character. For, upon the impious supposition of his being so, who could rely upon—who believe his own word ? even tho' the "Lord spake face to face unto him, as a man speaketh unto his friend ;" and as he is said to have spoken to Moses. *

2. THE goodness of God, as it is a property of his nature, should always be considered as inseparably connected with his *wisdom* ; and regulated thereby in all its operations. It is not to be considered as a sort of blind instinct, or good-nature, detached from reason and right, or a regard to fitness and propriety. The goodness of God is not simply a disposition in

his nature to do good, uncontrouled, undirected by wisdom ; similar to what is observed in some of his creatures in certain instances. Infinite wisdom, or the most consummate, the most perfect reason, is indissolubly connected with goodness in the great God : And the former is, undoubtedly, if One may so express it, the leading, regulating, and all-directing attribute of his nature ; in such sort, that there are no exertions of mere power, or of mere goodness and benevolence in him ; but every thing that is done by him, is done according to the immutable rule of wisdom, or perfect reason ; of which He himself, and only He, is in all cases an adequate judge. If God be indeed an infinitely knowing, reasonable, and wise being ; it is surely no presumption to say, and even a duty firmly to believe, that he never, in any case whatever, acts unreasonably, or unwisely. And if this be the case, as, I suppose, is universally acknowledged in words at least, by all professed christians ; what was said above, undeniably follows ; viz. that none of the actions of the great God, are merely and solely the exertions either of power or of goodness ; but all conducted by a wisdom that cannot err.

It is well for the creatures of God, for the whole creation, that this is the case. For, in so wide-extended, not to say boundless an universe of things, so various and complicated, what might be the consequence—I speak it with reverence and awe—what might be the consequence of omnipotence exerting and giving a-loose to itself, without wisdom to direct its operations ! Yea, what might be the consequence, if goodness or benevolence itself, accompanied with irresistible power, but not under the conduct of wisdom, were to exert itself in the management of so various, extended and complicated a system ? What disorders and confusions ? what dreadful consequences might naturally be expected from

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from the exertions of omnipotence without wisdom, even tho' it were accompanied by such a blind, instinctive benevolence as that spoken of above? What mischiefs and miseries do we often see produced in this world, by weak mortal men that mean well, but have little or none of that wisdom which is "profitable to direct," to regulate their benevolent intentions? How often do very kind parents destroy their children, even by their kindness itself, for want of reason and discretion proportioned thereto? What prodigious mischiefs are sometimes produced, almost to the destruction of whole countries, kingdoms and mighty empires, by well-intention'd governors, kings and emperors, who really regard the people under them with a paternal affection; but yet want wisdom adequate to their high stations, & the business of ruling and directing nations? From hence we may in some measure conjecture, if we are not afraid even to think, what might be the consequence of boundless power, tho' accompanied with universal benevolence, but not adequate wisdom, exerting itself at once thro' out the universe. The very tho't is sufficient to fill One with dread and terror!

It may admit of some doubt, whether the effects of benevolence thus exerted by an almighty Being destitute of wisdom, might not be near as fatal to the universe in the end, as positive malevolence, ill-will and cruelty, exerted after the same manner. For even in this latter case, some good might possibly be done, contrary to the intention of the doer; as evil would certainly be done contrary thereto, in the former case. I do not indeed assert, that the mischiefs produced on the former supposition, would be equally great with those done in the latter. But, that they must needs be very great and terrible, is obvious. What would become of laws, order and, in a word, of good government, without wisdom to constitute them

them at first, and to support them afterwards? Every thing of this sort, on which the good of the universe essentially depends, must soon come to an end, if he that rules it were not wise, as well as good and powerful: Or, which comes nearly to the same thing, if he did not govern wisely. For there is no material difference, as to the effects and consequences, in these supposed cases, betwixt not *having*, and not *exercising* wisdom. What is not used, is as nothing: He that has wisdom, but does not employ it in what he does (tho' this very supposition seems absurd in itself) will act altogether as wrong and irrationally, as if he had none. And a blind man will find his way thro' an unknown country, altogether as well as one that has good eyes, but will not use them. We have therefore, as was intimated before, the greatest reason to rejoice, when we reflect that the goodness of almighty God, is necessarily and immutably connected with unerring wisdom; always directed thereby in its operations; never exerted without it, and much less contrary to it; which it were blasphemous to suppose. It is because the Lord of hosts is so "wonderful in counsel," that he is so "excellent in working." *

4. THE goodness of God is what all men are nearly concerned and interested in. It is perhaps, strictly speaking, the most amiable of the divine perfections; since God may be loved on account of it, without particularly taking his other attributes into consideration, in a manner in which he cannot be loved for any of the rest, without the consideration of this. Even wicked men may think with some sort of pleasure, on that goodness of God which they abuse; tho' the thought of his other attributes rather ministers disquietude and terror to them, than comfort and delight. If it were proper to make any comparison

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* Isai. 28. 29.

parison betwixt the divine attributes, or to say that one of them is more glorious than another, mankind in general, to be sure, would not hesitate much at calling this the most glorious. In a relative consideration of them, this might not, perhaps, be justly liable to any exception. Indeed, God himself seems to allow us to consider his goodness in this view; or as having, with reference to us, a peculiar preeminence and glory. For divine revelation dwells much longer upon, and treats far more fully and distinctly of this attribute of God, and the various manifestations thereof in his works and providence, and particularly in the redemption of the world by his Son, than of any of his other perfections, tho' all glorious and adoreable. It is also worthy of particular observation, as, indeed it has often been remarked, that when Moses besought God to manifest his glory to him, saying, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory;" the answer which he received was, "I will make all *my goodness* pass before thee, and—will be *gracious* to whom I will be gracious, and will shew *mercy* on whom I will shew mercy."* By which answer it is plainly intimated, that the glory of God does in an eminent manner consist in his goodness, grace and mercy: So that the prayer of Moses would be most effectually granted, by God's giving him a manifestation hereof.

THE eternity, immensity & immutability of God; his infinite knowledge, wisdom and boundless power; his perfect purity, holiness, and punitive justice; tho' all adoreable attributes, yet being considered independently of his bounty, clemency and mercy, rather astonish and confound, than please or delight us, by appearing amiable to us: Especially when we consider, not only our own weakness, dependence, and absolute need of continual support and succour from

* Exod. 33. 18, 19.

the guardian care, and kind providence of God, but our sinfulness and guilt, which at once render us unworthy thereof, & naturally excite distrust, diffidence and fear in us. What consolation can weak and sinful creatures draw from a consideration of those other divine attributes alone, or independently of goodness and mercy? They rather inspire such creatures with terror and amazement, than with comfort, hope and joy. Whereas, being considered as inseparably connected with goodness, which is equally essential to the divine nature, and exercised towards all the works of God; those otherwise formidable attributes, are, in a great degree, stripped of their terror. And not only so, but goodness does, if One may so express it, communicate its own amiable lustre & glory to them: So that even we guilty creatures, if penitent, may contemplate *them*, as well as goodness itself, with delight and joy; as being a firm support to our hope, and such a foundation of security and happiness to us, as even the most perfect goodness could not be without them. The divine goodness, therefore, being so interesting a subject to us; the ground of all our hopes as to time and eternity, it demands a very particular attention. And let me add, that it would be very *unnatural*, as well as impious in any, to restrain, limit or confine it, in a manner not warranted either by reason or the holy scriptures. *

5. It should be observed that the goodness of God, when spoken of in a general way, comprehends many, if not strictly all of his particular moral attributes: Such, for example, as are distinguished by the terms
C² mercy,

It is 10 or 12 Years since the Author saw the learned Dr. S. CLARKE's Sermon on the Goodness of God: But, if he mistakes not, there is a Passage in it, of which some Things in this Paragraph may appear an imperfect imitation.

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mercy, clemency, kindness, compassion, pity, grace, patience, forbearance, long-suffering, and even *justice* itself. That all these, except the last-mentioned, are only so many different branches or modes of goodness, denominated respectively with reference to the persons to whom, or the particular manner and circumstances in which, God manifests that goodness to his creatures, which in him is one simple, uniform principle: That this is true, I say, is very easy to see; and, indeed, so generally allowed, that it seems quite needless to spend time in the proof of it. But there are many persons, who seem to conceive and speak quite differently of the *justice* of God; as if it were not a mode or branch of goodness, and comprehended therein, but an attribute distinct from, if not in a degree repugnant to goodness. These different conceptions of the matter, tho' they may at first appear immaterial, are yet respectively followed by consequences of a very important nature. I shall therefore very briefly explain, and endeavour to establish, that sentiment respecting this point, which was hinted above. This I would do at once with all reverence to God, and with all due respect to those, who have different conceptions of the matter.

And here it may be observed,

(1.) THAT in a wise and good earthly parent, there is really no *such* distinction as that which has been mentioned, betwixt goodness and justice, not even in punishing; but the former includes the latter, as being one mode or manner of exerting itself, and attaining its end. For example; why does a truly wise & good parent, when under the influence, not of mere passion and resentment, but of reason only, correct his children, or punish them for their faults? Is it not in order to reform, and do them good? — or at least with a view to the benefit of his other children,

children, or those of the household ; that they may be kept under due subjection, and restrained from the like evil and hurtful practices ? In this case, inflicting adequate punishment, or such as is adapted to the good ends proposed, is plainly goodness. Tho' it is, and may properly be called justice ; yet it is so far from being either opposite to, or any thing really distinct from kindness and goodness, that the parent would be less kind and good than he is, if he did not punish. If any parent examines himself, upon what principle he corrects his children, he will either find that it is this of goodness, or else find reason to censure himself as having been actuated therein by some impotent, irrational and unjustifiable passion ; mere cruelty, anger, resentment, or the like. And, indeed, the frail " fathers of our flesh," tho' in general kind and good, may yet sometimes have corrected us thus, " after their own pleasure," or from a sudden, transient resentment, rather than with any formal and positive good design. In which case, they must needs censure themselves upon reflexion, as having acted unreasonably. So that in a good parent, as was said before, there is no such quality as justice, really distinct from goodness ; not even in punishing : For it is goodness itself that gives the blow.

(2.) THE case is the same in civil government. The most absolute sovereign on earth, supposing him to be wise & good, makes no laws but such as he at least thinks for the benefit of his subjects ; whom he also considers as his children, to be governed by him for their good. Neither does he inflict any punishments, but what he considers as needful for the support of his government ;— if not for the particular good of those that suffer, as in capital cases, yet for the good of his people in general, by way of example and terror, that good order may be preserved. So that
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even in this case of excision, or capital punishment, the justice of the sovereign is no real quality in him, distinct from goodness. It is goodness, or a regard to common good, that takes off the head of the traitor, that hangs the robber or murderer, & that "punishes other evil-doers:" Without which, the sovereign would "bear the sword in vain;" i. e. would not answer the good and important end of his bearing it, the preservation of order, public good and happiness. There is not the least color, in this case, for supposing any distinction betwixt goodness and justice in the prince; only as the former is a general principle, which comprehends the latter as one particular mode of it. And the earthly prince, in the sense of all mankind, degenerates into a tyrant, if he punishes his subjects for no better end, than to gratify his own anger and resentment. This leads me to observe,

(3.) THAT truly wise and good parents and princes, always overlook or *pardon* the faults of their children and subjects respectively, whenever they suppose this may be done, as in some cases it may, consistently both with the good of the offenders themselves, and of others; or both with private and common good. In these cases, what wise and good parent, or sovereign prince of the same character, thinks himself bound in *justice* to punish the transgressor? nay, does not think himself obliged in *reason* to remit the fault, or to shew clemency? Would it not be apparently contrary to true goodness, in these supposed cases, to punish for no good end, either with respect to the delinquent himself or others? Would not this be, to give another pain and sorrow merely for the sake of doing it? And what is this called amongst men, but cruelty? which is in truth contrary both to goodness and justice. It being therefore manifest, that in all wise and good earthly parents and sovereigns, justice even in punishing, is only another

no other name for goodness in one particular view, or under a certain modification of it, instead of being either opposite to, or any thing really distinct in nature from goodness itself : This, I say, being evident and undeniable, I proceed to observe,

(4.) THAT the great and blessed God is pleased, in his word, to represent himself to us very often under the character both of a *Father* and of a *King*. For, "There is One God and *Father* of all, who is "above all, and thro' all, and in you all," saith the apostle. "We are the *Offspring* of God," saith the same apostle : And "of *Him* the whole *family* "in heaven and in earth is named."—The title of *King*, is one of his usual titles in scripture. He is called emphatically by our Saviour, "the great *King*." He is stiled the "King of heaven," as well as "King "over all the earth." And in my context, the "glory of his *kingdom*" is spoken of ; which is an "everlasting *kingdom*."

(5.) THOUGH the analogy will not hold in all respects betwixt an earthly parent or king, and our "Father who is in heaven," or that great "king "eternal, immortal, invisable, the only wise God," who hath "prepared his throne in the heavens ;" yet there can be no doubt in general, but that, when these titles are given to God in his word, the design is, to represent him under the character of the *wisest & best* Father, the *wisest & best* King ; not that of an *unreasonable, unnatural, and cruel* parent ; not that of an *unwise and unreasonable, a cruel and unmerciful* king. None can doubt of this.

(6.) WE may therefore conclude from hence, That *that* wisdom and goodness, which are very imperfect in the best earthly parents and kings, are in perfection in the blessed God. And that he governs his

his great family, his universal kingdom, according to those general rules and maxims which are in themselves most wise and good ; such as the *wisest* and *best* kings govern by ; only, as was intimated before, in an infinitely more perfect manner. From whence, I think, (tho' it doth not become a mortal man to speak confidently in such cases) that it follows,

(7.) THAT there is not really in the great and glorious God, any *such distinction* betwixt goodness and justice, as has been objected against. For if any earthly parent or king should act according to what that distinction supposes, and so punish his children or subjects, not as goodness directs, or without a positively good and valuable end, such parent or king would be reckoned therein, neither wise nor good, nor even just, but unreasonable and cruel. What ground is there then to imagine, that there is any such kind of justice in God, distinct from, or rather opposite to goodness ? Does reason suggest any such thing ? No. Do the holy scriptures assert or suppose it ? No : nothing like it. There is therefore, great reason to think, that this is a distinction only of man's making. There can, I think, be no conceivable *fitness, propriety* or *congruity* in inflicting punishment, independently of an *end* to be answered thereby. Those terms, when used with reference to punishing transgressors, suppose and refer to some end ; otherwise they are unintelligible. And this end must be either positively bad, or positively good : For what is, in every respect, indifferent, can be no end worthy even of human, much less of divine wisdom. And to say that the all-wise and good God, has a bad or evil end in any thing which he does, were impious indeed ! The conclusion from which premises, is too obvious to need mentioning.

(8.) THAT

(8.) THAT God, our heavenly Father, chasteneth and punisheth his children in this world for their *good*, is evident from numberless passages in scripture. And there is one which deserves a more particular attention here, on account of the reference therein to the conduct of earthly parents, who sometimes correct their children only for their own "pleasure:" Whereas God corrects his for their "profit"—"Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth—We have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us *after their own pleasure*; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness—Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.*" No Man will deny, but that God is at once just and good in these chastenings. Goodness and justice in him, therefore, are not to be considered as *opposites*: They may, in all other cases without exception, be co-incident; the latter being, perhaps, only a particular modification of the former, and tending to positive good, at least the public or common.

(9.) SHALL we?—can we really suppose, That He who is good to *all*, and whose tender mercies are over *all* his works, ever punishes his creatures without any good end, either with respect to themselves, or to the other members of his household and kingdom? Would not this be in effect making his creatures miserable, either for no end at all, or a positively bad and evil one? Would not this be, what is always called unreasonable and cruel amongst men? To say that the infinitely wise and good God, punishes any of his creatures merely for his own glory, without any regard to the preservation of order and happiness, and even contrary to the common good of those,

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* Heb. 12. 6—12.

those, to whom he was pleased to give being, appears to me at best very irrational. For what glory could possibly redound to any being by acting unreasonably, or contrary to the dictates of true goodness? It is peculiarly absurd to suppose that He, who accounts *goodness* his *glory*, should aim at advancing it by *such* a conduct!

(110.) THE great, blessed and glorious God, is indeed an *absolute Sovereign*: He has an indisputable right as well as power, to dispose of all his creatures according to his own pleasure. But it ought not to be inferred from hence, that he is an *arbitrary* being, in that ill sense in which the word arbitrary is used respecting tyrants; implying that they govern in an unreasonable, unjust and cruel manner. Tho' God is, in the highest sense, an absolute sovereign; yet in *that* ill sense, he is not certainly an arbitrary Being; and it were blasphemous to think him so. The blessed God, tho' omnipotent, tho' over all, and not accountable to any, yet exercises no power, no authority, but according to his infinite wisdom and goodness. To act contrary to them, would be to "deny himself," and to act contrary to his own glory instead of advancing it; which are both impossible. So that the great and blessed God may, with the strictest propriety, be stiled, A sovereignly wise and good Being. If his power and dominion, on one hand, are without bounds, without limits, his wisdom and goodness are equally unbounded, unlimited, on the other; and no less essential to him than existence itself. And "let him that glorieth," saith the most High, "glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise *loving-kindness*, *judgment* and *righteousness* in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."*

BUT
Jer. IX. 24.

BUT I proceed to consider more particularly,

II. THE extent and perfection of the divine goodness, according to the representation in the text: Wherein it is declared, that "the Lord is good to ALL," &c. And there are several observations to be made here, preparatory to a distinct explanation of these words. The first is,

I. THAT the creatures and works of God, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, are exceeding numerous. How vast is the number and variety of them, only in this lower world? How many different ranks and orders of living creatures, exclusive of men, people this earth, air and water, from the mountainous elephant, and enormous whale, down to the mite, too small to be seen but by a borrowed microscopic eye? And how prodigiously numerous are the individuals of almost every of these different species? But when we raise our eyes and imaginations from this comparatively little globe, to the numerous and stupendous world above and around us, to whose extent in space there are no *apparent* limits, any more than to space itself; and when we reason analogically from this to those, we may with great probability conclude, that they are also peopled by a number and variety of creatures, proportionably greater than are in our own. How astonishing?—how surpassing imagination itself; then, must their variety & number be!—"O Lord, how manifold are thy works? in wisdom hast thou made them ALL!"—*

2. THE exercise of benevolence or goodness, in the strict notion of it, supposes creatures that are at least *sensitive* and *perceptive*, tho' they may be irrational. None besides such, are in nature *capable* of enjoying the divine goodness, the effects of it, or of

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having

* Psal. 104. 24.

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having goodness and mercy exercised towards them. God cannot properly be said to be good or kind to the earth and water, or to mere inanimate, lifeless, unperceiving matter.

3. On the other hand you will observe, that **ALL** such creatures as are endowed either with reason, or a perceptive faculty only, in how low a degree soever, are actually *capable* of happiness, or agreeable sensations. They are therefore naturally capable objects of the divine goodness and mercy. I mean, it is supposable, or implies no natural impossibility, that all such creatures may actually experience the effects of God's beneficence. As to the fact, I do not at present concern myself with it : But it is manifest that the Creator and Lord of all, *may*, without any inconsistency or absurdity, be supposed actually good to all that are, by the nature which he has given them, rendered capable of participating in the effects of his goodness.

4. Of those creatures that are capable of enjoyment or pleasure, some are doubtless capable of it in far higher *degrees* than others. Some have apparently, not only quicker senses, but more in number than others. Some are but one little remove from lifeless, unsensed matter : And the capacity for happiness in all, is probably in proportion to the number and quickness of their senses, or perceptive faculties. It should be added here, that all the inhabitants of this earth, men excepted, are apparently incapable of the greatest & sublimest pleasures that we know of ; those of reflexion, moral virtue, religion, the knowledge and love of God, and hope in him. These are pleasures of a peculiar kind, belonging only to reasonable creatures.

5. FROM

5. FROM hence it follows, that tho' all are, in a degree, capable objects of the divine beneficence ; yet some may be so in a far *higher* and more *eminent* sense than others. God may easily be conceived actually good to all, & yet not *equally* so to all. Or rather, it is evident that he is not so ; as certain, almost, as it is, that he is actually good to any, in any degree.

6. God may properly be said to be good and merciful to all those, for whose welfare he *provides* according to their respective natures and capacities, however inferior. If these are upon the whole happy, or if those of an higher order might be so, did they not abuse the divine goodness, God is certainly good to them : And this, tho' a degree of pain should attend their enjoyments ; yea, tho' an end should be put to the existence of some of them so soon after they began to be, that their term of life would be but as a moment. There is *real* goodness and kindness shewn them, even upon this supposition, however little : For whatever any enjoy, be it more or less, it is from the mere goodness of the Creator.

7. IT is supposeable, that in producing such a wonderful, and almost infinite variety of worlds and creatures ;—creatures with such different capacities of enjoyment, the infinitely wise Author of all, had a view to the general, common good of his creation ; and consequently, that this variety itself may contribute thereto. Even we, who are so short-sighted, can in many cases clearly see how variety, due subordination of *parts*, &c. actually contribute to the beauty, perfection and real benefit of an *whole*, or what is considered as such. May not then, the amazing variety observed in the one real *whole*, the UNIVERSE, possibly tend to the beauty, advantage and perfection thereof ? Or must we conclude, that because *we* cannot particularly see and comprehend all the relations
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and connexions of things thro'out the universe, so as to perceive how this variety in every instance actually contributes to the perfection thereof, therefore HE that made it cannot, or did not design it for that end ? A presumptuous conclusion indeed !

8. THERE is positive and strong reason to think in general, that this is actually the truth : And the manner of reasoning is such,—so plain, that all in general may easily perceive the force of it. The argument may be reduced to a very few words, thus :—This variety was not *undesigned*, or produced for *no end*. Nor can it be supposed an *indifferent* thing in itself, whether it should be, or not : No man of the least reflexion can imagine so. If then, it was neither *undesigned*, nor a matter of *indifference* in its own nature, it must have been intended either for a positively *wise and good*, or a positively *unreasonable and malevolent* end. There is no medium ; this is the dilemma. To say the *latter*, is nothing short of a blasphemous imputation of folly and malevolence to the Creator. The *former* therefore, is even demonstratively the truth ; *viz.* That this almost infinite variety amongst the creatures of God, was designed by him for, and therefore actually tends to, the ornament, perfection and real good of the universe.—“ And God saw every “ thing that he had made, and behold, it was very “ good ;” superlatively, perfectly good.

9. THIS variety, order, & particular arrangement of the creatures and works of God, being supposed in the whole “ very good ;” all such questions as these, Why one was not made another ? Why men were made men, rather than brutes or angels ? Or angels, angels, rather than either of the other ? Why birds were not made beasts, & beasts birds ; & fishes were made fishes, instead of beasts or fowles ? Why the lowest individual of the lowest species, was not made

made the highest of the highest ; and *vice versa*, the highest, not the lowest ?—All such queries, I say, carry their own futility & self-repugnance in their very face. They imply a plain contradiction, as much as it would be to ask, Why Noah's dove was not originally made the ocean, the moon or a comet ? Or, Why the sun that now lightens the heavens, was not made a glow-worm ?—Is it not plainly *impossible*, that a *dove* should have been an *ocean*, a *moon* or *comet* ; or the *sun* a *glow-worm* ! And is it not equally impossible, that men should have been angels, or angels men, &c ? There is, therefore, as much folly as impiety, in “ the thing formed saying to Him that formed it, Why “ hast thou made me thus ?”

10. ALTHOUGH such creatures as are in their natures capable of pleasure, are alone capable *objects* of the divine beneficence, strictly speaking ; yet the goodness of God may be made manifest *in* and *by* all his *other works* in general ;—tho' inanimate and senseless. Thus the earth, the sea and this lower air, with all that is therein, may serve to manifest the goodness and mercy of the Creator, while the heavens declare his glory.

THESE things being premised, we may now proceed to a more particular consideration of the text. And the doctrine of the inspired Psalmist here, comprehends the following particulars ; viz.

FIRST, That the Lord of all is actually good and kind to all the different *ranks, orders* or *species* of his intelligent and sensitive creatures ; all the species that are capable of happiness, in whatever degree.

SECONDLY, That he is likewise good and kind to all the *individuals* of which these species consist.

THIRDLY,

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THIRDLY, That all his *other works* in general, tho' incapable of *enjoying* his goodness and mercy, or the effects of them, yet serve for the *manifestation* thereof. And,

FOURTHLY, That God is therefore an *absolutely*, a *perfectly* good and merciful Being, or good in the highest conceivable sense.

THESE propositions are very fairly contained in the general doctrine, or assertion of the text; That "the Lord is good to ALL, and his tender mercies OVER ALL his works." Accordingly, I propose to consider and illustrate these points, rather as being the exprets doctrine of *revelation*, and to be believed on the authority *thereof*, than as things which are demonstrable by *natural reason, observation* and *experience*. For tho' this is in general a most rational doctrine, for the proof whereof, arguments of the latter kind are not wanting, some of which may be briefly hinted at; yet a proper discussion of it in this way, would require many discourses, and such a kind of reasoning also, as is not so convenient for the pulpit.

To return then :

FIRST, The Lord of all is actually good and kind to all the different *ranks, orders* or *species* of his intelligent and sensitive creatures; all the species that are capable of happiness, in whatever degree. That God is good to angels, is doubted by none; and, that he is good and merciful to mankind, is, in words, allowed by all. The principal design of the holy scriptures, is indeed to shew the "riches of his goodness" to the children of men; especially in their redemption by his Son. He is good to the beasts of the field and forest, to the fowles of the air, to the fish of the sea, to all the species of reptiles, to every

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kind of insects, the most inferior not excepted; such as shun the naked eye. All these he upholds in the being which he gave. He preserves the respective orders distinct, from age to age. He makes suitable provision for them all, and opens to them his stores. The holy scriptures, particularly the book of Job, of Psalms, and the writings of Solomon, abound with reflexions upon the provision which the Author of nature has made, for the subsistence and comfort of the animal and sensitive creation. The 104th Psalm, which is a pretty long one, is chiefly taken up with reflexions of this kind. The beasts, fowles and fishes are particularly mentioned as the objects of God's providential care: "These wait all upon thee," says the Psalmist, "that thou mayest give them their meat in due season—Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good."* So in my context (ver. 15 and 16.) "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season—Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest *the desire of every living thing.*" Many sorts of beasts, fish and fowle, and even more insignificant creatures are particularly instanced in, in the holy scriptures, as examples of God's universal care, & objects of his kindness: Whales, oxen, sheep, horses, the ostrich, stork, &c. And our Saviour himself disdains not to speak more than once, of the goodness of God to "ravens" and "sparrows."

If there are other planets or worlds inhabited, we may be certain that God takes a similar care of the various orders of creatures in them, answerable to their respective natures and wants. It were highly irrational to suppose, that He has made any one species of creatures, capable of sensation in any degree, and then neglected it as below his providential care. All kinds of living creatures that we know of, mani-

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* Psal, 104. 27, 28,

fest the wonderful wisdom of the Creator in their frame and structure. And if he thought proper to exercise such a truly divine art in the formation of them, surely he would not leave them unprovided for, and so, to unavoidable misery, when formed. Nothing, no species, surely, which God has created, is too insignificant for God to take care of. And how could it be said with any propriety, that his tender mercies are over *all his works*, if any one whole species were neglected and abandoned by him?

BUT is it only the various species, that God is good and kind to?—not the particulars of which they consist? That would be strange indeed! And this brings us to the second thing implied in the text; *viz.*

SECONDLY, That God is likewise good and kind to all the *individuals* of which these species consist. Every *whole* being made up of parts, and every species consisting of individuals only; it is not very easy for *common sense* to conceive how an whole, or a species can be kindly provided for by the God of all, as some have supposed,* and yet the parts, the individuals, be disregarded & neglected by him. Is God the maker of the species only, not of the individuals? That were a very mysterious position; a curious discovery to match the other! Indeed, they must needs go together. For if God is supposed to be the maker of the individuals, it follows as undeniably from hence, that he will take care of individuals, as it does from his creating the species, that he take care of the species. The reasoning that will hold with respect to one, will hold equally with respect to the other: If it fails in one, it will fail in the other also. And, as was hinted before, if individuals are neglected or overlooked, it is plain that the species themselves are not provided for, unless the species can

* *Ld. Bolinbroke, &c.*

be preserved, when all the individuals are left to perish ! A providential care of the species, evidently involves the like care of the individuals thereof ; at least of some of them. And if God takes care of some, why not of all ? Is this too laborious a task for Him that is at once omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent ?

BUT how can God be said to be good to *all* ?—how could it be affirmed, that his tender mercies are over *all* his works, if there were some of his creatures, his works, originally unprovided for ? To say that this means only all the species of creatures, but not the individuals, is taking an unnatural and unwarrantable liberty with the holy scriptures, besides the absurdity of the very supposition itself, and the setting of bounds and limits to the divine goodness. Nay, would not this be to suppose God positively cruel to some of his creatures ? There is no medium betwixt his being actually kind and merciful to all, and his being positively cruel and unmerciful to some. For, please to consider, that when God makes creatures capable of happiness and misery, in whatever degree ; if he does not also make provision for their comfortable subsistence, and take a kind care of them, he of consequence dooms them to inevitable pain and misery, even without any fault of theirs ; since if a creature is actually made, and preserved in a state of sensibility, it must be either in a degree of pleasure or pain. If it be not the former, it must of course be the latter. And, upon the present supposition, this is wholly owing to God's not making that provision for the creature, which was absolutely necessary for its well-being, according to the nature given it by himself. Now, let some very acute distinguisher shew the difference betwixt this and positive cruelty : It would be in vain for an ordinary genius to attempt it. And when any One has fairly made out

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this distinction, he will probably be able to reconcile such a conduct in the Creator, with the express doctrine of scripture, that he “*satisfieth the desire of every living thing.*” But

It will perhaps be said, that the universal terms *all*, *every*, and the like, are sometimes used in a restrained, limited sense : And that there are plain reasons for, and an absolute necessity of, understanding them in this limited sense in many places of scripture. This is granted : But then, they ought never to be thus limited, but understood in their proper, natural and unconfined sense, unless there is positive reason, or some real necessity for such a limitation of them. Let any One who thinks it reasonable and necessary *to limit the goodness and mercy of his Creator*, shew it to be actually so, and I will then acknowledge the reasonableness and necessity of limiting the signification of those universal terms, in which he is declared to be good and merciful to *all*, to *every* living thing. For unless you can prove the former, it is impossible you should ever be able to prove the latter. Limiting the sense of these terms in the present case, is plainly limiting and setting bounds to that goodness, which is declared in and by them to be unlimited in its extent. Neither will any man, who really believes God to be good to *all*, ever desire to find out any reason for putting a restrained sense upon the term *all* in the text.

BUT let us, for a few minutes, take it for granted that *all*, here, does not literally mean all, or every individual ; but that there are some individuals of every species, to which God is NOT good ;—some of his works, over which his mercy is NOT extended. How *many* then, of each species, shall we suppose in this situation ;—thus forgotten or neglected by him that made them ?

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LET us, for example, suppose one *half* of every species, thus abandoned by the "God and Father of all." I ask then, Whether all these individuals, to which God is not good and merciful, must not inevitably be wretched; each of them being left destitute of a proper supply to its natural wants? No One can doubt of this. All, for whose well-being God makes no provision, must of course be miserable: For who besides Him can provide for them? I ask, in the next place, Whether this supposition is consistent with the spirit, and manifest design of the text, even tho' the term *all*, twice used therein, did not literally intend every individual? I ask, in the next place, Whether the supposition, that one *half* of every species are thus abandoned to unavoidable misery by their Creator, is consistent with his acknowledged *general character*, as a good and merciful Being? Is not this supposition highly, and very obviously repugnant to *that* character; and therefore, to the honor of God? It may be again demanded, Whether they who think this to be the truth (if any such there are) do not, in effect, unite in their imaginations the two independent and opposite principles of the Manichæans, the one good, the other evil, into one self-contradictory being, whom they call, and whom they worship under the name of, the "One God and Father of all!"—Let me ask once more, Whether this supposition of one *half* of every species thus abandoned, be not a very *moderate* and *modest* supposition, according to the representations which some persons have given of God's conduct towards one of the most *considerable* species that we have any particular knowledge of?

BUT you will allow, perhaps, that the supposition of one *half*, is too large; that it is not agreeable to the text, to reason, or to the general idea of God as a good, kind and merciful being—"Half is, indeed, too many, and shocks the mind at once!"—I understand you well. Instead of saying one *half* then, we will say

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say only, one *quarter*. Will this supposition stand the test? What! One *quarter* part of every species, both of sensitive and rational creatures, abandoned thus to inevitable misery by their Creator; and yet this same Creator declared in his own holy word, to be good to all!—A *quarter* of all God's creatures of every kind and order, are a great many, surely, to be thus cast off and forsaken by Him, whose tender mercies are said to be over all his works!—If you consider, and recollect yourselves, I believe you will think the number still somewhat *too large*—What! a *quarter* part of the whole! But if you will not yet give this up, let me vary the language of the text a little, and paraphrase it so as precisely to express your sense of it, thus—"The Lord is good to *three quarters* of his creatures, and his tender mercies are over *three quarters* of all his works: But to the other *quarter* he is not good, kind or merciful; but leaves them to unavoidable misery and destruction."—Will you allow this to be a natural paraphrase, or to give the genuine sense of the text?—"No: it *sounds* harshly; and seems too much to limit the divine goodness."

WELL then, let us suppose only a tenth, twentieth, fiftieth, hundredth, or, to cut the matter still shorter, only one *thousandth* part of the whole rational and sensitive creation, doomed to inevitable misery in the manner before expressed—Will you abide by this? Will you abate nothing of it?—When you consider the innumerable millions of creatures, many of them rational ones, that must, even on this supposition, be wretched, does it sit easy upon your minds?—Is not the number, in the whole, too large still?—A *thousandth* part of all, of every species, in all worlds;—probably enough to people thousands of such worlds as this!—How can that be; and yet God be an exceeding good, kind and merciful being? I am persuaded that, upon reflexion, you will not stand to this.

SUPPOSE

SUPPOSE then, but ten individuals, or five, nay, two only of every species, nay, but *one* ; yet these must amount to a vast number. For the number of the species even in this little globe, is great ; how prodigious then, must it probably be in all worlds taken collectively ? And will not one individual of each of them, amount in the whole to too great a number to be thus doomed to unavoidable misery, by Him who gave them being ? Is even this consistent with his acknowledged general character as a good and merciful Being ? If you think soberly and impartially, you will chuse rather to lessen the number still, than to defend this supposition.

WELL then, suppose but a single individual of one species—Only let that be a reasonable creature, capable by nature of knowing and enjoying God eternally, whom he never displeased by any act of his !—No—It shall be but an irrational creature, and that of the very lowest, the most inferior species, that is thus doomed to all the pain which it is in its nature capable of enduring.—And can you seriously think that the Creator and “ Father of all,” has pitched upon this poor mite, to make the existence which himself gave, wretched ! Why ? sin it could not : And is it agreeable to wisdom, goodness and mercy, to make an *innocent* creature miserable thro’ the whole term of its existence, whether longer or shorter ?—If you are resolved to defend even this lowest of all suppositions which the nature of the question admits, you should, I think, paraphrase the text thus—“ The Lord is good to all *but one*, and his tender mercies “ are over all his works, *excepting a single* insignificant “ creature, which either escapes his notice, or at “ which he is angry, and so makes it miserable, tho’ “ it neither has, nor is capable of offending Him.” How do you like this paraphrase ? You must needs adopt one to this purpose, if you oppose what I am endeavouring

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endeavouring to establish;—the universal goodness and mercy of God, in the highest and most literal sense of the terms “all,” and “every living thing,” used in scripture with express reference to the extent of his goodness.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ speaking of those *sparrows*, “five of which were sold for two farthings,” says that “*not one* of them is forgotten before God.” * This may doubtless be said with equal truth, even of creatures inferior to sparrows. And One need not scruple to say, that the supposition of any of them being forgotten, forsaken and abandoned by him, in the sense so often mentioned, is dishonourable to God; an unworthy imputation upon his wisdom, goodness, mercy, &c his providential care respecting a creature which he thought proper to call into existence. So that tho’ some things and creatures, of which I have been speaking, are in one view, indeed, very inconsiderable; yet the end pursued all along is of the last importance. But if it would be dishonourable to God, to charge him with treating only one of the most inferior of his creatures in such a manner, what shall we think of that doctrine, which represents him as treating *millions of millions* of his rational creatures after the same manner!—or rather, after a manner almost infinitely harder to be reconciled with wisdom, goodness and mercy!—I will not say, what ought to be thought of it; but leave it to your calm and serious reflexions. To proceed,

THIRDLY, All God’s *other works* in general, tho’ incapable of *enjoying* his goodness and mercy, or the effects of them, yet serve for the *manifestation* thereof. In agreement hereto, by those words, “all his works,” we may fairly understand, not only his reasonable and sensitive creatures, but all his other works without

without exception. As if it had been said, that God is not only kind to all his creatures that are capable objects of his kindness, but hath left the vestiges, the marks, and plain indications of his goodness, even of his tender mercies, impressed upon all parts of the creation ; all things being adapted to answer benevolent purposes respecting the creatures that are capable of enjoying good. This is no harsh construction of the words : But whether it is just or not, in point of criticism, it is undoubtedly true ; and this sentiment corresponds to what is declared in many other places of scripture. " God saw *every thing* that he had made ; and behold, it was *very good*." *All* his works are, accordingly, said to be made by him in *wisdom*, to *praise him*, and the like. Such passages must be supposed to have some reference to the goodness of God's inanimate works, considered with relation to his reasonable & sensitive creatures, to whose pleasure and use they are adapted ; either by affording subsistence to them, or pleasing the eye, ear and imagination ; or being really beneficial in some other respect. It is not easy to conceive, why they should be called " very good," or said to " praise him," but upon the supposition of their being wisely and kindly adapted to afford subsistence, pleasure and delight to creatures capable of enjoyment.

It is indeed evident to sense and reason, that the *whole* visible creation is the work of a good and merciful Being, not merely of a most intelligent & powerful One. The structure, the admirable order and adjustment of the various parts, nothing superfluous, nothing wanting, from whence results the harmony and beauty of the whole, prove the former as certainly as they do the latter ; loudly proclaiming at once the power, wisdom and goodness of the adorable Creator. The air, heavens, earth and sea, besides affording habitation and subsistence to so many
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millions of other creatures, are all adapted in some degree at least, to the use and delight of man in particular. Here are harmony to ravish his ear, beauty to feast his eye, grateful odors to regale his nose, delicious fruits, liquors, &c. to gratify almost all his senses at once. So that ample provision is made, not only for his necessary support, but his pleasure and delight also, within the bounds of reason, or a virtuous moderation. And if nature, or rather its Author, sends diseases, he also sends remedies : Nor are there fewer antidotes than poisons in the natural world ; tho' there is, indeed, now no " tree of life " to be seen therein, of which we may " eat, and live forever " here. But " wisdom is a tree of life to them " that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one " that retaineth her ;"—even *immortally* happy thro' the second ADAM, the Lord from heaven, who hath " abolished death, and brought life and immortality " to light thro' the gospel."—But not to digress.—There is no one sense, natural appetite or want, either in man, or in the other inferior inhabitants of the earth, but the beneficent Author of all, has made provision for the regular gratification and supply thereof. Every visible object in the natural world, has a beneficent end ; if not with relation to man, yet with respect to the other creatures ; not one of which is below the care of, or " forgotten before God." Even the extended barren sands and deserts in some parts of the earth, the equally barren rocks & promontories in others, and the inaccessible precipices, mountains and wildernesses in others, have their good and merciful ends, or uses. They serve at least for shelter, and a secure retreat to the fowles of heaven, where they may hatch and nurse their young : And also for four-footed beasts, and creeping things, lest their species should, perhaps, be otherwise destroyed by MAN, that " mighty hunter before the Lord."

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THE benevolent uses and ends of almost all parts of the visible creation, are very obvious. And as to those particular things, the final causes, or good ends whereof lie less open to common view; the more attentively they are examined, and the better understood, the more clearly do they manifest both the wisdom and goodness of God; shewing that the "earth is (indeed) full of his riches," while the heavens proclaim his glory. In which view particularly, the writings of King David, Solomon, and many other men of philosophic, contemplative minds, are of singular advantage, and redound greatly to the honor of God. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all those that have pleasure therein. His work is honourable and glorious, and his RIGHTEOUSNESS endureth for ever. He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered." * The works of God, as has been intimated before, are honourable, and declare his glory more especially, considered as "good," and as having his "tender mercies" manifested in and by them. Yea, it may be questioned whether they are truly glorious at all, considered merely as the effects of great knowledge and power, or without any relation to benevolent ends. Certainly, no One could think the works of a malevolent or unmerciful being, tended to his praise and honor, whatever art, contrivance and power appeared in them. This art, contrivance and power, being applied to evil and malicious purposes, would be rather a proper ground for reproaches and execrations, than for such praise and glory as are justly due to the ever-blessed God, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are "over all his works."

FOURTHLY, God is therefore an *absolutely*, a *perfectly* good and merciful Being; or good in the highest conceivable sense. This follows evidently from the

* Psalm **xcix**. F 2

the text, and what has been discoursed upon it. According to this character of him and his works, goodness and mercy are the most pre-eminent, the most distinguished attributes of God : For his unsearchable wisdom and infinite power, if One may so express it, are but the *ministers* of his infinite goodness, being wholly employed to accomplish his good and gracious purposes respecting his creatures. Accordingly, the construction which some learned men have put upon the latter part of the text, is this, that God's tender mercies are *above* all his other works, or the most conspicuous, great & excellent. However the critics may settle this point, still the important conclusion is equally obvious and certain ; That God is absolutely, universally and perfectly good. It is accordingly said of him, by One that came down from heaven to declare and make him known to the inhabitants of the earth, that there is " none good but ONE, that is GOD." Agreeably whereto St. John says, " GOD is LOVE : " Words which express, in the strongest and most emphatical manner, his essential, boundless and perfect goodness. And it is worthy of particular remark, that tho' God is infinitely wise and powerful, &c. as well as good, yet he is never stiled in scripture, *wisdom* or *power* in the abstract, as he is here stiled LOVE. Perfect goodness, love itself, is his very essence, in a peculiar sense ; immeasurable, immutable, universal and everlasting LOVE. And nothing that is in any manner or degree inconsistent with such love, has any place in God : For " God is light, and in him there is *no darkness* at all." *

To me it seems at once impious and absurd, as involving a contradiction, to suppose that we can even conceive, or have any idea of, a goodness and mercy more consummate, more perfect than any which *actually exists* in nature, or the God of nature. From whence

* I John I. 5.

whence should this idea, this conception of absolute, perfect and unchangeable goodness come? Or how could we have it, any more than ~~those~~ of unbounded space, and of time without beginning, i. e. of immensity and eternity, if there were in nature no such thing? In these cases, there doubtless is, and must be, something which answers to the ideas; at least, our mental conceptions, the copies, cannot surpass and exceed, cannot be greater or more perfect than any *existing original*.

God being supposed all-knowing, independent and almighty, the absolute perfection of his goodness may be deduced from hence, together with all moral qualities in the highest possible degree. Such a Being must know what is *in itself good*, as an END, *viz. happiness*; and also know whatever is right and reasonable, excellent and glorious: Which may all be comprehended in *doing good*. He must also know all the possible means, or ways of doing it; and, which are the best, properest, and most effectual; so as to be subject to no mistake or error. Moreover; being independent and all-powerful, he cannot be under any *wrong* bias, or have any *difficulties* to discourage him in pursuing what is right;—any end truly great, noble and excellent. From these premises, which I do but hint at, it follows undeniably, that such an all knowing, independent and infinitely powerful being, must also be infinitely, perfectly good. The fitness and reasonableness of being so, would undoubtedly *determine him to be so*. By which last expression, I am far from designing to suggest, either that there was a time when God was not good, or that he might possibly have been otherwise. I mean the direct contrary in both respects; *viz.* that as this fitness was eternally seen, God was eternally good; and as he saw it necessarily, he was as necessarily good; and yet not contrary to his own will or choice, which were a contradiction; but

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but in conformity thereto, even from eternity. For nothing was prior, not even the existence of God, to his will to be good ; or, in other words, to his goodness : For these are the same thing in the ever-glorious God.

BESIDES : If God is allowed to be *now* good in *any degree*, it will from hence follow demonstrably, that he is eternally and necessarily, universally and perfectly so ; essentially and equally good in all times & places. Nothing is *now* a property in God, which was not so from eternity. If he had ever been destitute of goodness, whence should it be derived to him ? He must have eternally remained destitute of it, unless you suppose some other being greater and better than Him, “ of whom are all things,” to communicate an excellency to him, which he originally wanted in himself !—God was, therefore, both eternally and independently good. And if so, then necessarily. For there was not a possibility of that which is eternal, underived and independent, being otherwise than it is. The supposition that it might have been otherwise, would involve the absurdity of supposing something prior to eternity, able to make it otherwise : So that it would be, strictly, neither eternal nor independent, tho’ it is supposed to be both. God is therefore eternally, independently and necessarily good, at least in *some degree*. And if in any degree, then absolutely, infinitely and perfectly good. For whatever is necessary in God, is essential to him, or a part of his very nature : And God being himself infinite, or unlimited, all his properties or attributes must be so likewise ; since it would be a repugnancy, to suppose finite and limited essential qualities in a Being, who is himself necessarily infinite. God is then, not only eternally, necessarily and essentially, but infinitely or perfectly good. And if so, then equally, universally and immutably good in all times and places. For
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it were a contradiction to suppose what is eternal, necessary, essential, infinite and perfect in God, to be various or changeable;—different in one *time* or *place*, from what it is in all *others*. Such variety, such mutability and changeableness, are demonstrations of a temporary, precarious, dependent, unnecessary, finite and imperfect nature.—Thus it follows from God's being *now* in any degree good, that he is eternally, necessarily, essentially, universally, perfectly, invariably and immutably good.

THAT the *appearances*, or *manifestations* of divine goodness, are various and manifold in different times and places, is not the least objection against the absolute perfection and *sameness* of that goodness itself, in all others. This is no more than the natural, necessary consequence of perfect goodness, in calling such a wonderful variety of creatures into existence; who, if they exist at all, must exist in certain particular times and places. And the external manifestations of God's goodness, must be just as various as the creatures which he has made to partake of it. Which latter variety among the creatures being positively good, right and best, the former variety in the appearances of goodness, are so likewise; instead of being any sort of objection against the universality, perfection or unchangeableness thereof. The manifestations of divine *power* and *wisdom*, are also different in different times and places. And yet no one is so absurd as to infer from hence, that God is not essentially and equally, perfectly and invariably wise and powerful in all others: Tho' the inference would be altogether as justly drawn in the latter cases, as in the former: Or rather, in both it would be wholly groundless and irrational.

LEAVING the particular objections that were to be taken notice of, and the proposed reflexions upon

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on this subject to the afternoon; I shall beg leave to conclude this discourse with two or three short remarks. And,

I 1. THOUGH it is demonstrably certain upon principles reason, that God is perfectly good and merciful; yet, whatever sinful creatures might imagine, they could not, without an express revelation from heaven, know that God would certainly pardon their sins on repentance. This might seem probable; but it could not be intirely depended on, to the exclusion of doubt, and all just cause for uneasy apprehensions. The reason is, that *punitive justice* is a branch of goodness, in such sort that a perfectly good and merciful being may in *many* cases be obliged to punish transgressors, in pursuance of his general benevolent designs towards his creatures; for the support of order, right, &c. on which the common good essentially depends. And how should a vicious man, especially One who has been so to a great degree, know, upon principles of reason only, that he is not himself One of those whom it is, in this view, necessary for an infinitely wise and good God to punish, for a terror and warning to others? None but God himself, who knoweth all things, certainly knoweth who may, or may not be pardoned, consistently with the eternal rule of right, of wisdom and goodness; and under what particular circumstances. The light of nature leaves us *more* at a loss respecting this matter, than his own reason leaves a common mechanic, (who is quite ignorant about affairs of state and policy) whether his Prince should, in pursuance of the public good, pardon a rebel, or strike off his head. A man may, indeed, very probably leap to this comfortable conclusion, that he himself is One of those who may, and certainly shall be, forgiven of God. Pride, self-love and mere vanity, may buoy up his hopes, and preserve him from any great concern about

about futurity. But if he goes no faster nor farther than reason, or the light of nature actually leads him, he must at best be left (like an half-founder'd vessel) to be tossed upon the billows of anxious doubt and uncertainty, if not to sink into the abyss of an horrible despair !

2. ONE principal end of Jesus Christ's coming into this apostate world, was to proclaim the glad tidings of pardon and eternal life to sinners, as the free gift of God thro' his mediation ; particularly thro' the atonement to be made by his blood, when he should "offer himself up to God, as a lamb without blemish and without spot": Thereby supporting the honour of God's violated commandments, and the dignity of his government ; in such sort, that guilty creatures might receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, in a way the most agreeable to infinite wisdom ; and therefore really more agreeable to infinite goodness and mercy also, than if they had been pardoned and saved without any intervening sacrifice for sin. Thus, by the christian revelation,—a light indeed from heaven, sinful men are delivered from that state of darkness and perplexity respecting pardon and a future state, in which the mere light of nature actually leaves them. In this dispensation of grace, the goodness of God to, and his tender mercies over the sinful children of men, are most clearly and gloriously manifested. It is both a faithful saying, my brethren, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save even the chief of sinners. Take heed therefore, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain ; for he is not willing that "ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance."

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3. It is greatly to be lamented, that this gospel of the kingdom,—the glad tidings of great joy to all people ; so full of heavenly peace, comfort and hope, and such a wonderful manifestation of the love of God to mankind : It is much to be lamented, I say, that this “ glorious gospel of the blessed God,” should be so perverted by many ; so restrained as to the number of those, for whose salvation it was designed ; so narrowed, so clogged with needless difficulties and unscriptural mysteries, by dark systems of divinity produced in dark and corrupt ages, as to become rather an engine for disturbing truly pious and good christians with doubts and fears, than to be an adequate relief to awakened sinners, by really manifesting the riches of God’s goodness to a guilty world in its proper extent, thro’ Him that “ gave himself a RANSOM FOR ALL, to be testified in due time.”* And I seriously declare, that if I were to form my conceptions of God’s moral character, by such discourses as I have sometimes heard and read, and such as were, by many, thought to be truly *evangelical* ; instead of thinking Him really “ good to ALL, and his tender mercies over ALL his works ;”—essentially good, and infinitely the best of Beings, I could not but conclude Him to be *infinitely* more *unjust* and *cruel*, than any other being in the universe !

To conclude : It is to hoped that the blessed God, the Father of all, has no children here before him, so depraved as to suspect that I have extolled his goodness *too much*, or represented him *better* than he is !—O that I could praise him more ! For “ who can shew forth all his praise !”†—But if there are any persons so degenerate, as to think their Father in heaven too much honoured ; instead of telling them, there is another title better adapted to persons of

* 1 Tim. II. 6. † Psalm 106. 2.

of such a depraved mind, than that of *Sons*, I must again refer them to my TEXT, to the apostle John, to our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the holy scriptures in general. I have said nothing, as to the extent and perfection of God's goodness, but what I first learnt from them; nothing more than God has revealed as truth. And if it is truth at all, it is certainly most interesting, important truth; to be known, and joyfully received by all, to the glory of God; at once to shew men what sentiments, dispositions and affections, ought to possess their hearts with relation to Him, and to form their temper and behaviour towards others — Thus shall ye be, indeed, “the children of the HIGHEST; for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your FATHER also is merciful.” *

* Luke 6. Chap.

The end of the first Sermon.



SERMON,



SERMON II.

Some Objections against the
Goodness of GOD considered ;
and the Subject applied to the
Occasion, with practical Infe-
rences and Reflexions.

PSALM CXLV. 9.

*THE LORD is good to ALL ; and
his tender Mercies are over ALL his
Works.*

*****HE first thing proposed in handling this
*****important subject, was,
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*****It. To make some observations on the
*****goodness of God in general : And the

II^d. To consider the extent and perfection of it,
according to the representation in the text : Wherein
the LORD is declared to be "GOOD to ALL," &c.

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THESE things were done in the morning. I proceed therefore, by divine assistance, without repeating any thing said under these two heads, to the third proposed; viz.

III^{dly}. To take a cursory notice of some of the principal objections against the divine goodness.

HOWEVER demonstrable it may be from certain known and acknowledged principles, that the great and glorious God is perfectly good; or how frequently and clearly soever it may be declared in the holy scriptures, that he is thus good; yet it cannot be denied, that there are many things, both in the visible world, and in the scriptures themselves, which may, at first view at least, have the appearance of considerable objections against it. This is not, indeed, a proper occasion for entering very minutely into such matters as these. There is not time for it, if One were so disposed. But yet it might, perhaps, be thought a material omission, if I passed over ALL the difficulties that occur with reference to what is asserted in the text, in *total* silence. And the present season of the year * itself, suggests one objection; with which I shall therefore begin.

I. SOME have found fault with the constitution of the world, or that course of nature which subjects the inhabitants of this earth, both man and beast, to the extremes of heat and cold. A great part of the year, it is said, we are half frozen; and another considerable part of the year, we are parched with excessive heat. Is not this a great infelicity? And how came such a course of nature to be established, if the Author of it is "good to all,"? &c.

LET it be here briefly observed, THAT

* December,

THAT if this is any real fault or defect, it might be attributed as properly to a want either of wisdom or of power, as of goodness. Why should it be imputed rather to a defect of the latter, than of either of the former, in the Author of nature ? But,

THE objection does, in effect, amount to no more than this : That we are not placed in so agreeable a situation, or in so delightful a world, as we may ourselves imagine and desire. Which, tho' true, is not a more solid objection against the goodness of God, than that we are not angels instead of men, and were not originally placed in heaven instead of earth ; or that there is variety in God's works. That this variety is the consequence of his being infinitely wise and good, and therefore no objection against either, was observed in the foregoing discourse. And if that which falls to our lot, is not the most agreeable situation of any ; yet, surely, we had not originally any right to a better. *

God mercifully provides us fewel and cloathing to defend us from the frosts of winter, and rains and breezes to refresh us in the heats of summer ; thereby mitigating the severity, & the supposed inconvenience of these alternate extremes. Besides ; this vicissitude in the seasons, the gradual changes from one to the other, are in some respects very agreeable. This is a pleasing variety. According to my own taste at least, it is much more grateful than any one constant, uniform, unvaried temperature of the air would be. This variety is probably much best upon the whole, even for those that complain of it. Naturalists and learned Physicians have made it appear beyond doubt, that these vicissitudes in the seasons contribute very much, upon the whole, to the health, strength

* See the 7th, 8th and 9th observations in the preceeding discourse, p. 29, &c.

strength and vigor of mankind, and other terrestrial animals ; and, at the same time, to the promoting of vegetation, and the increase of those fruits, &c. which are needed for their subsistence. Moreover :

By means of that particular oblique position of the earth's axis, from whence, in her annual course, this variety in the seasons proceeds, a large proportion of the earth is render'd habitable, comfortable and fruitful, which would otherwise be absolutely uninhabitable, barren and desolate. If the sun, to speak according to the appearance, did not depart from the equinox, and alternately pay a friendly visit towards the two poles, a much greater part of the earth about and towards them, would be uninhabitable by excessive cold ; and the course of vegetation would be intirely stopped. At the same time, that part of the earth under and about the equator, would be render'd equally uninhabitable and barren, by the sun's constantly beating upon it : And, as some have computed, at least five sixths of the whole globe * would, by this means, have been intirely useless. There would not have been provision made for so many men, and other animals, by many millions, yea millions of millions, if God had placed the earth, and given it such a direction, as some persons in their presumptuous folly would have had him done, to preserve them from the imaginary inconvenience of the seasons ! These reflexions on them are, I think, sufficient, not only to reconcile us both to summer and winter, but to give us exalted ideas of the infinite wisdom and goodness of God in these vicissitudes of nature.

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* Vid. Dr. CHEYNE's *Phil. Prin. of Relig.* Ch. V. Sect. 25 and 26. Where there are many curious observations on the seasons.

2. ONE might here naturally take occasion to speak of storms, tempests, droughts, pestilence, earthquakes, and some other phænomena in the natural world, which some persons may consider as objections against the goodness of God. But I must only observe in general, that some of the foregoing remarks on the seasons, are equally applicable to these other appearances. If they render life less secure and comfortable; yet it must be remembered that God, tho' infinite in goodness, is not obliged to put all his creatures into situations equally desirable; especially sinful creatures. Nay, infinite wisdom and goodness require the contrary. But some of the things abovementioned, evidently contribute, in their places, to the perfection of the natural world. Others of them are adapted to answer the most important moral ends, considering the nature of man, who needs to have his attention frequently roused to religious and moral subjects. And if there are any of those things, as I am far from thinking there are, which are not positively beneficial in either of these ways; yet they at least proceed from such general laws of nature, as are upon the whole most wise, good and excellent; and which could not, probably, be broken in upon, or suspended in their operations, without great detriment, perhaps destruction to the world.

3. It may be objected, that there are many poisonous, and other noxious vegetables & animals. But,

THERE are also many natural means of preservation from, and remedies of, these supposed evils: And most things that have certain poisonous qualities, being properly prepared by the art of the physician and chimist, are themselves the best antidotes and remedies that are known in nature.

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As to those animals that are troublesome & noxious to mankind, they may yet enjoy pleasure in life *themselves*: And who told us, that they ought to be wholly subservient to the happiness of *man*? Besides, mankind, in the present state, actually need trials and afflictions, as a means of promoting their moral good, and future happiness. There is no doubt, but that this is one end which the infinitely wise and good Creator has, in the production and preservation of such animals. It seems probable, from some passages of scripture, that had mankind persevered in their original innocence, as they would not have needed such afflictions, so neither would they have had them; the nature of the inferior creatures before the fall, having been different in some respects from what it has been since. Nor is it an impossible supposition, whatever a false, minute and spurious philosophy may suggest, that at the "time of the restitution [or reno-
"vation] of all things, spoken of by the mouth of all
"the prophets since the world began," * these mischievous and noxious creatures may cease to be such.—
"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the
"leopard shall lie down with the kid: And the calf,
"and the young lion, and the fatling together, and
"a little child shall lead them. And the cow and
"the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down
"together: And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
"And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the
"asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the
"cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy
"in all my holy mountain: For the earth shall be
"full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters
"cover the sea." †

4. WHAT has just now been said, naturally brings to mind another objection. How many millions of the inferior creatures on the earth, in the air and water,

* Acts III. 21.

† Isai. XI. 6—9.

water, seem to live and die in a miserable manner, preying continually on one another; while all of them are, in some degree, the prey of man, who tho' so much less and weaker than many of them, yet out-wits, and so plays the tyrant over them all? How does it consist with the goodness of God, to make such creatures, and leave them in such a state!

It may be answered, that these animals, birds, fish, insects, &c. appear in general to enjoy no small degree of pleasure in life, while they are preserved in it, according to their respective natures & capacities. The bountiful Author of nature feeds them all, and supplies their wants. Leviathan, and all the watry tribes play, disport themselves, and rejoice for a time in the great deep, the lakes, ponds and rivers. The birds and fowles of heaven do the like in the air, the water, or on the earth, as suits them best. The beasts do the same in the pastures, woods and forests. The smaller animals, reptiles, and all insects do the like. And men generally take a kind care of domestic animals, and of all those which they either employ in their service, or design for their food; liberally feeding and feasting them.

Most of the untamed animals, &c. die a natural death without fear, and probably without much pain, when they have run thro' the courses and stages assigned to them respectively. And as to those of them that become the prey of man, or of one another; this is seldom, if ever, till they have enjoyed much more pleasure in life, than they endure pain in being deprived of it. Especially when it is considered, that their death is commonly almost instantaneous; and without any such uneasy reflexions on what is past, or apprehensions respecting futurity, as mankind experience. So that all these living crea-

tures, whether wild or tame, in all probability enjoy a surplussage of pleasurable sensations, according to their natures and capacities : And if so, the Author of their being is good and merciful to them. It should likewise be considered, that those living creatures, which afford food and sustenance to man, or to other creatures, at the expence of their own lives, thereby do good to their *devourers* ; and so, in a sense, add to the common happiness even by their tragical end.

BUT if there are any of them, which do not enjoy a share of pleasure superior to their pains in life and death ; (an unsupported hypothesis) yet how came you to know, that there is certainly an end of all, or any of them at death ? Who told you that they do not transmigrate into, or assume other bodies successively, in which they enjoy life in a more perfect manner than in the preceeding state ? Has God plainly revealed any thing to the contrary, in his word ? No. Does reason discern any impossibility, absurdity, or even improbability in this supposition ? Neither of them. Nay ; there is some natural and positive ground of presumption, or a degree of probability, that this is really the truth. It is certain that every *living, sensitive* creature, is endowed with some principle distinct from matter ; call it soul, spirit or what you please, it is of no consequence. All matter, all that is properly and solely such, is evidently void of animal life and sensation, of all feeling and perception, in every degree. The living, sensitive, feeling and perceptive principle, therefore, in all animals, insects, &c. is immaterial, or something absolutely and intirely distinct in nature from matter. And this *may* survive the body, be continued after the dissolution of the present organs of sensation, and live in another body, if the Author of its being pleases it should :
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Tho' I do not presume to assert positively, that it will. But there is nothing absurd, unscriptural or irrational in the supposition : Nay ; the transformations, or transmigrations that are actually observed in some living creatures, render it credible in itself, and, in a degree, probable. But if the supposition is barely a *possible* one, it is a sufficient answer to the objection drawn from the sufferings of brutes and insects, against the express doctrine of scripture, That the " Lord is good to all," &c. Though, by the way, if this last, hypothetical solution should be given up as indefensible ; yet, as was intimated before, it can never be proved that any one of these living creatures endures either more, or as much pain, as it enjoyed pleasure, in life and death.

5. It will not be unnatural to proceed from hence to that capital objection, which is grounded on the many sufferings and pains of mankind in the present state, too well known to need describing.

To which I answer, That mankind also enjoy many pleasures ; and, as is generally supposed, many more than are equivalent to the pains which they endure in this state. If we are subject to diseases, the Author of nature has also in mercy provided remedies. He feeds and cloaths us, and supplies our natural wants ; as to most of us, in a very liberal manner. Most of the pains, both mental and corporeal, which mankind suffer in this world, are of their own creating ; they are the natural effects of intemperance, and other vices. And it would be very injurious to object these against that goodness of God, which we thus abuse to our own hurt.*

At least some of the sufferings of this life, are judicial and corrective ; brought upon us by the providence

* See page 29, Remark 6th of Serm. I.

vidence of God for our sins, to chastize, and thereby to reform us, in order to our present and future good. And all such *evils*, as we may call them when considered merely in themselves, are actually effects of the divine goodness, instead of being solid objections against it. *

BUT there are some children, who are born, live, and soon die, in pain; before they have actually done any evil, or committed any fault. Be it so. But do you certainly know, that what they enjoyed in the womb before their birth, was not more than equivalent to what they suffered at the time of, or after it, in life and death? You have no *proof* of this, however *positive* you may be. But, allowing you to be certain, as well as confident, that these infants endure more than they enjoy, antecedently to their dying; yet are not their souls immortal? And are they not still in the hands of Him, who has said, "Behold, all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine—The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father?"† Is it not then, at least supposable that such infants, never having sinned in any strict or proper sense, go to an happier state than that, out of which they were taken? And if so, their momentary pains here, are no solid objection against the goodness of God. Indeed, if there are any persons who assert, that besides these pains, they suffer the "wrath and curse" of God, and "the pains of hell for ever;" it is doubtless impossible to reconcile this, not only with infinite goodness and mercy, but even with a very small degree thereof. To suppose that they either properly committed any sin, long before they were conceived in the womb; or that the sin of Adam and Eve, is or can be so imputed to them,

* See p. 25. Remark 8th of Sermon I.

† Ezek. 18. 4, 20.

them, as to render them *justly* liable to eternal misery, without any offence of their own, is one of the grossest of all absurdities. They who are capable of believing such unscriptural and irrational doctrine, and of thinking justice so much at variance with goodness, wisdom and mercy, as this supposes, are to be pitied as persons of a sadly depraved judgment. But if it were allowed that these "infants of a span long," were justly liable to eternal torments, as some have asserted; yet upon their own principles, and even according to their own false idea of divine justice, God *may* shew mercy to them. They do not pretend to say, that God is obliged to go as far in punishing as he might go, according to their conceptions of justice. So that these infants, upon any principles which suppose the immortality of the soul, *may* be eternal monuments of that goodness and mercy, against which their untimely death is thought an objection. And the bare possibility of this, is a sufficient answer to that objection, unless it could be proved that some of them are *certainly* devoted to future torment;—an opinion equally irrational, unscriptural & antichristian.

6. It may perhaps be objected, that the scripture doctrine of Christ's atonement, or sacrifice, is inconsistent with what has been said concerning the perfection of God's goodness; and particularly with that idea of it which was given in the preceeding discourse, as comprehending justice in it; which latter is not there supposed to be any attribute of God, distinct from, but one branch or mode of, his essential goodness. If God be thus perfectly good and merciful in his nature, why did he not forgive the sins of men without any sacrifice? without any reconciliation for sin? especially if divine justice is nothing distinct in nature from divine goodness. What occasion was there for any atonement, upon these principles?—

Whereas

Whereas the scriptures constantly suppose the need of it in order to the pardon of sin.

UPON the principles of the foregoing discourse, infinite goodness itself, considered in connection with infinite wisdom, requires that order, and the highest veneration for the majesty of God, his laws and government, should be preserved amongst all his reasonable creatures. Their own good essentially depends upon it. And this important end is most effectually attained by the sacrifice of Christ, "by whom we have received the atonement." We are assured in the holy scriptures, that God forgives the sins of men thro' this great sacrifice intervening, rather than without any, not because he is in his own nature deficient in goodness, or not perfectly merciful, but because he is infinitely *wise* as well as merciful; taking such a method herein, as is in its nature admirably adapted to "magnify the law, and make it honourable;" i. e. to beget and preserve in the minds of reasonable creatures, a just sense of God's authority, the dignity of his laws and government: Which, as was intimated before, is evidently best even for themselves. In this sense the apostle, having observed that Christ by the grace of God tasted death for every man, adds, "For it BECAME Him, "for whom are all things, & by whom are all things, "in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the "Captain of their salvation perfect thro' sufferings."* It became his wisdom, it became his goodness, it became his mercy, even that very "grace of God, by which Christ tasted death for every man." There was a fitness and congruity in it, as the wisest and best method for saving sinful men, without any kind of reference to that common, but yet *strange* supposition, of divine justice being intirely distinct from divine goodness. Besides :

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* Heb. II. 9, 10.

THE scriptures uniformly speak of Christ's mediation, and his dying for sinners, as the effect or consequence of God's original goodness and mercy. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,"* &c. "In this was manifested the love of God towards us—He loved us, *and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*"† These representations of Christ's dying, "the just for the unjust," as *consequential* to, and the *effect* of, God's love, mercy and grace, are so far from supposing any such justice in God as is often spoken of, distinct in nature from goodness, and to satisfy which, it is said, Christ died; that they appear to me absolutely irreconcilable therewith. Neither does it seem even possible to assert, and solidly to maintain, this most important doctrine of our redemption by the blood of Christ, but upon the supposition of its being the wisest and best, i. e. the most benevolent and gracious method of dispensing pardon and life to sinners; in such a sense as wholly and forever to exclude any such idea of divine justice, as is often given us.—Tho', by the way, these things are not said by me, but with an high veneration for those many wise and excellent men, who either have, or seem to have, different conceptions of this matter. But,

7. How shall we reconcile the supposition of God's leaving the whole heathen world to unavoidable and eternal misery, with infinite goodness and mercy?

To this it will be sufficient to answer in general, first, That it is by no means a clear and certain point, either from reason or revelation, that all the heathen will actually be miserable in the world to come: And, secondly, That if they shall be so, they will be punished only for their sins; and in due measure only. And

* John 3. 16.

† 1 John IV. 9, 10.

to punish them thus, is not, certainly, inconsistent with the most perfect goodness.

8. WHAT shall we say to the doctrine of God's having reprobated a great proportion of mankind; or, from eternity devoted them in his absolute decree and purpose, to eternal torments, without any respect or regard to any sins of theirs, as the procuring and meritorious cause of their perdition? and this, at the same time, to make manifest and glorify his JUSTICE! What can be said to this? and how shall it be reconciled with the supposition, that God's *tender mercies* are over *all* his works?

I WILL tell you, in a very few words, what I have to say to it at present. And that is, first, That if any persons really hold such a doctrine, neither any man on earth, nor angel in heaven, can reconcile it with the goodness of God. And, secondly, That I have not my self the least inclination to attempt a reconciliation of these doctrines; being perswaded, that they are just as contrary as light and darkness, Christ & Belial;—that one of them is most true and scriptural, joyful to man, and honourable to God; and the other most false and unscriptural, horrible to the last degree, to all men of an undepraved judgment, and blasphemous against the God of heaven and earth. Neither is it possible for any man, who really believes what the scriptures teach concerning the goodness of God, even to think of this other doctrine, but with great indignation. But,

9. How can what the holy scriptures unquestionably teach, respecting the greatness of the punishment of those who die impenitently under the gospel, be reconciled with God's goodness & mercy as declared in the same scriptures? To this it is answered,

I. THAT

1. THAT God certainly exercises great goodness and mercy towards such sinners in this world ; not only in supplying their temporal wants, but in affording them such means of knowledge and eternal happiness, as nothing but their own wilful blindness and perverseness can render ineffectual to that end. All are invited and perswaded, in the most gracious and pathetic terms, to accept of eternal life, thro' Him that " gave himself a ransom for all."

2 It is not inconsistent with the most perfect goodness, especially in certain cases, to punish wicked men. No earthly sovereign is accounted the less good or merciful for punishing rebels, traitors and felons even *capitally*, when the support of his government, and the common good of his kingdom require it. Nay, should he neglect to do it in this case, he would be the less good and merciful ; because it would be a sort of cruelty to his other subjects : At best it would be a great weakness in him. Why then should God, the great and only Potentate, be thought the less good or merciful for inflicting such punishment on wicked men, as the support of his government, and the great end thereof, call for ? Goodness, perfect goodness, nay, tender mercy itself requires this : God would not be perfectly good and merciful, if he did not inflict *such* punishment, how terrible soever in its nature and duration, as is requisite to this end.

3. THE light of nature ascertains neither the kind, the degree, nor the duration of that punishment, which is necessary to be inflicted on the wicked in another world, in order to the due support of God's government ; or, in other words, in order to the attaining the good, great and glorious end thereof. Men may, if they please, presume and be confident, that *this* or *that*, and no more, is necessary in

order to the end proposed ; and therefore conclude, not unjustly, if the premises were true, that no more, greater or more durable pains and penalties, will be inflicted. But after all this confidence, mere human reason is as inadequate a judge of the matter, as a child of ten years old is, what course his King ought to take with those that have broken the laws. The light of nature leaves mankind altogether as much in the dark in one case, as this child's reason leaves him in the other. Which, by the way, shews the necessity of an express revelation from heaven, if it were only to give sinners the *assurance* of a pardon.

4. THE obvious conclusion from these principles, is, that it becomes us to sit down contented with what God has actually revealed, respecting this subject. He, and only He, knows particularly, how great or durable punishments are necessary to answer the good ends of his universal government ; or how it becomes infinite wisdom and goodness to dispose of sinful creatures. Human reason knows not what is wisest and best in this case. So that, I see not what any sober man has to do in it, but to inform himself what the real doctrine of scripture upon the subject is ; and to acquiesce in whatever God has declared to be his purpose. Whatever that be, we may rest assured that it is at once most for the glory of God, and for the good of his universal kingdom ; such punishment as it becomes the God and Father of all to inflict. For " shall not the Judge of all the earth do right !"

HAVING said thus much concerning the future punishment of wicked men, the duration of which, you know, is divers times expressed by the words, *eternal, everlasting, for ever and ever*, and the like ; it is needless to subjoin any thing particularly about that of the rebel-angels : For the same principles and general way of reasoning, are equally applicable to both.

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THERE is no just and sufficient cause to doubt, either from any appearances in nature, or from any *real* doctrine of revelation, but that God is good and merciful in the highest conceivable sense. But there are positive, conclusive and demonstrative proofs of his being so. Let me add here, that if this doctrine of the perfect goodness of God, is not strictly true in the highest imaginable sense, (tho' I almost tremble even at making such a supposition, which I abhor as impious,) there is not sufficient ground for an unreserved trust and confidence in him. For if he may be supposed to act unreasonably, cruelly, or contrary to the dictates of goodness in any one case, why not in others? why not in many? why not in any supposed case? Where then is your safety? What security has any man on earth, or angel in heaven, that he shall not, even without reason, without just cause, become the object of God's insupportable wrath! Will you say, that you are effectually secured by his own gracious promise? But what firm, unreserved confidence can be placed in his word and promise, unless he is supposed to be perfectly good and faithful? If he is not so, he may deceive you; and, instead of exalting you to heaven hereafter, "thrust you down to hell!" If he deals arbitrarily, capriciously and cruelly by others, may he not do the same by you, notwithstanding his supposed word and promise? No doubt: For any being that acts such a part in one case, may do the like in another. Where then is your "Rock" of peace? On what is your hope, your confidence grounded, upon the present supposition?—Alas! on nothing better than the word and promise of a being, who is capable of acting unreasonably, arbitrarily and cruelly; or contrary to the dictates of goodness!—A miserable support to an immortal soul, that must be either happy or miserable while it exists, and is absolutely dependent upon Him

Him that made it !—It is, therefore, at least for the *interest* of all, that God should be as perfectly good and merciful, as he has been represented : Which, tho' it is no direct *proof*, is yet sufficient to shew, that no man can in reason be prejudiced against this doctrine, or have any dislike to it, even upon supposition that he does not at present see sufficient evidence of it. Tho', how any One can possibly doubt of it, and yet believe the holy scriptures, is quite unaccountable. For is it not therein declared—"The Lord is good to ALL, and his tender mercies are over ALL his works ?" But I proceed,

IV. To make some application of this subject, by reminding you more particularly of the great goodness of God to Us, both in temporal and spiritual respects ; and by such inferences and reflexions, as may at once tend to the honor of God, and shew what influence the consideration of his goodness, ought to have upon your hearts and manners.

Now, if we consider ourselves as MEN, we are a distinguished order of creatures, and under great obligations to our Creator. However inferior we may be to many creatures in other parts of the universe ; (inferior indeed !) yet there is no presumption, no vanity in saying, that we are much superior to any of the other inhabitants of this world. For which pre-eminence of nature and rank, we are indebted only to Him that *made us thus* ; "of whom, and thro' whom, and to whom are all things."

IF we consider ourselves, in the next place, as creatures *redeemed* from sin and death by the Son of God in human flesh, we are still more wonderfully favoured and distinguished. God is in Christ reconciling, not a comparatively small part of mankind to himself,

self, according to the representations of some, but the "WORLD" itself. For Christ "is the propitiation—for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD." And it "pleased the Father—by him to reconcile ALL things unto himself, by him, I say, whether things in earth, or things in heaven."—"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," in this respect!

If we consider ourselves as having been born and brought up in the *christian world*, had the advantages of a religious education, and "even from children known the holy scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation;" we must acknowledge the particular kindness & goodness of God to us in these regards. Had we been born in a land of Pagan or Mahometan darkness, or had we been born and educated Jews; we might probably have been Pagans, Mahometans or Jews to this day: Whereas we are now Christians, by profession at least; and if we are not practically such, the fault is our own.

WE are still farther distinguished and favoured of God, by having been born and bred in a *protestant* country, and a *reformed* part of the christian church; instead of a roman-catholic country, & in the errors, superstitions and idolatries of the church of Rome. For had the latter been our lot, we should probably, the most of us, have been enslaved to those delusions, and the papal tyranny to this day. And those of us, whom God should have given light and courage enough to cast them off, might have suffered a cruel persecution, and "for conscience towards God endured grief;" as protestants now do, even in France itself, from a pretended most polite, humane and refined, but really *barbarous* people in some respects. And yet they are by far the least bigotted to the papacy, of any roman-catholic nation!

If we consider ourselves as *British* subjects, and entitled to the liberties and privileges of such, both civil and sacred; we must acknowledge that providence has, in this respect, favoured us above most other protestants: Very few of whom, I might perhaps say none, live under so happy and excellent a form of government as ourselves.

We are also favoured of God, the universal Sovereign, in having a good King, as well as an excellent constitution of government. Bad Kings may prove a sore scourge even in a free government, tho' there is an old paradox, that they "can do no wrong;" of which our own nation had repeated and dreadful experience, before the ever-memorable and glorious REVOLUTION. Since that, we have had good Princes: And his present Majesty is doubtless one of the best-intention'd Monarchs in the world. We may say, upon good grounds, that "because the Lord loved us, therefore made he him King over us, to do justice and judgment." This he has hitherto done; and will doubtless continue to do it, if the *Achitophels* and *Machiavels* are kept from, and possibly even tho' they should surround, the throne.

We must farther acknowledge the goodness of God in lately giving the King a Son and Heir; and thereby confirming to all his loyal subjects, the agreeable hopes of the protestant succession being perpetuated in his illustrious house.—Heaven preserve the King, the Queen and the royal Infant: The two former, to be illustrious examples of conjugal affection and happiness;—of all piety and virtue, not only to their own subjects, but to other Kings and Queens: And the latter, to inherit his Father's virtues with his throne, whenever it shall please Him who "ruleth in the kingdom of men," to exalt the One above, and raise the Other to it!

WE are, moreover, to acknowledge the goodness of God in continuing to succeed the King's arms, in the course of the year past, after having crowned them with so many illustrious successes and victories for several years before. Two very signal acquisitions have been made by the British arms, since our last annual thanksgiving;—those of MARTINICO and the HAVANNAH. And since these, the principal place in NEWFOUNDLAND, which the enemy had in such a *mysterious* manner possessed themselves of, has been rescued out of their hands. This important recovery was effected with admirable dispatch and facility, highly to the honor of those who had the immediate planning, conduct and execution of the enterprize. And, upon the whole, we have the greatest reason to expect an honorable, advantageous and lasting peace. For I will not—cannot suppose, that either folly or pusillanimity, private avarice or treachery, in the cabinet, will relinquish those signal advantages which wisdom and valor, which public spirit and loyalty obtained in the field, and on the mighty ocean, thro' HIM that has “rode upon the heavens for our help, and in his excellency upon the skies;” tho' similar things have been done in former reigns!*

If we come to our own country in particular; we have here enjoyed, of late, almost all the blessings of peace, in a time of war & tumult among the nations of Europe. We have also been favoured with general

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- * N. B. Since the delivery of this discourse, we have had the important advices of the King of Prussia's, Prince Henry's and Prince Ferdinand's successes; of the Spaniards retreat out of Portugal, and the signing the PRELIMINARIES for a PEACE betwixt Great Britain and Portugal on one side, and France and Spain on the other. But it was tho't proper to leave the paragraph above, as it was delivered—May the God of peace and love perfect the good work of peace thus begun!—

ral health. Our invaluable civil rights and privileges are preserved to us. I do not say, that they have even been struck at, in any instance or degree—But if they have, they are not wrested from us : And may righteous heaven blast the designs, tho' not the soul or the body of that man, whoever he be amongst us, that shall have the hardness and presumption to attack them !

LET me add, that tho' we were visited with a pretty severe drought in the summer past, yet the rains which succeeded, came so seasonably, and in such competent measure, that there is a supply of the necessities, and very many of the comforts of life : So that, to say the least, there is no danger of famine or distress amongst us for want of them. And we have also been, and still are, greatly favoured in the temperate and moderate weather, continued this year so much beyond the usual time : Which is, in divers respects, a great mitigation of the calamity in the drought before-mentioned.

THUS, my brethren, I have briefly reminded you of some of the many instances of God's goodness to mankind in general, and to ourselves in particular : All which it becomes us gratefully to acknowledge to the glory of Him, who is "good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works." It now remains, to draw some practical inferences & instructions from this subject. It affords many important ones : And, indeed, I shall mention a considerable number, tho' but briefly, for fear of being tedious. And,

I. THE consideration of God's goodness, shews the reason and proper ground of love to God, and complacency in him. To love, or delight in an evil, cruel, arbitrary and unrighteous being, as such, is impossible

possible to any, except unreasonable and depraved minds. But such a being as God is represented in scripture ; One so good and merciful to All, must needs be loved by every person that is not himself unreasonable, corrupt and depraved to a monstrous degree. For what is it but, I had almost said, *infinite* folly, perverseness and wickedness, not to love infinite goodness !

2. WHAT has been said concerning the divine goodness, as comprehending justice, and the other moral perfections of God in it ; shews that he ought to be loved on account of these also. That is, he is to be loved, considered under the character, not merely of a benevolent Being, in the common restrained sense of the word benevolence ; but under the character of a most holy, just and righteous, as well as kind and beneficent Being. God's moral character is to be taken all together ; the several branches of it are to be considered as united by and in the bond of love, and inseparably connected with infinite wisdom. And then, God is to be loved as a Being of such a character ; a character, in its own nature infinitely amiable. Nor is there any true, proper and genuine love to God, but what respects him in the whole of this character. Even wicked men may and do, often at least, love him as a kind, bountiful and merciful Being, in a restrained, partial sense of those words, while they hate him considered as a just, righteous and holy One. But this is not to love God in the sense of scripture. Good men, and only such, love him as the source and centre of all moral perfection in general.

3. HENCE it is easy to see, not only the reason why, to love God is spoken of as the first and greatest of all the commandments ; but also the ground of that

intire and ardent, I had almost said, that infinite and boundless love to him, which is required of us. For if God is indeed such a Being as the scriptures represent him, it is at once manifest that we ought to love him first and last; and not only sincerely, but "with all our heart & with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind." Even of such a love from all, that Being is manifestly the proper object, who is himself "good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works." And the more largely God has caused us to partake of his goodness, whether in temporal or spiritual regards, the stronger is our obligation to love him thus; and the more inexcusable we are, if we do not.

4. FROM hence we may clearly see the reason, why, to "love our neighbour as ourselves," is spoken of by our Saviour as the next, the *second* commandment, and *like* unto the first; why love is represented as the "fulfilling of the law," &c. For if God is thus good, it is evident that, next to loving himself, he must require his intelligent creatures to love one another; and this as the sum of all the duties which they mutually owe to each other. No particular duty of the moral law, I mean, of the second table, can naturally and reasonably claim such a pre-eminence, such a glorious precedence in the order of offices, as charity, which does in a sort comprehend them all; even as God's goodness comprehends his other moral perfections. And love must needs be the supreme, universal, unchangeable law of such a Being, to all his reasonable creatures; to angels in heaven, as well as men on earth; and to creatures inferior to men, if any such there are, capable subjects of moral government; as it is highly probable there are.

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4. FROM hence appears the unreasonableness, and great sin of indulging anger, revenge, disproportionate resentment, and an implacable spirit; together with the wisdom and importance of those numerous precepts in the gospel, relative to meekness, forbearance, forgiving injuries, and the like. The indulgence of any of those passions, any farther than may reasonably be supposed conducive to some positively good end, is not merely contrary to the spirit and precepts of the gospel, but it renders men peculiarly unlike to the infinitely good & merciful God. Nor is there any thing greater, more glorious and god-like, than to love them that hate us, and to do good to them that spitefully use us. Neither is it without a very peculiar emphasis, that He who died for us as sinners and enemies, enjoins us to do thus, "that we may be the children of our Father in heaven, who is himself good to the unthankful and to the evil."

6. It may from hence be inferred, that all God's particular commandments, as distinguished from those two grand, most fundamental & comprehensive ones before-mentioned, are not only holy and just, but good; actually kind and beneficial in their nature, design and tendency; adapted to promote the great end of his universal government, the good of his creatures, and therein his own glory: For these are inseparably connected. Or, if any chuse rather to express it thus,—That God's view is, to promote his *own glory by doing good*, making the latter the *means*, and the former the *end*; I have no objection, except that it may, perhaps, seem to represent him rather as an ambitious Being, who desires the praise & homage of his creatures, than an infinitely good One, who aims at making them happy without any *selfish* end, incompatible with a perfect character, and with absolute

solute self-sufficiency.—But I *assert* nothing upon this point. However that may be, yet it is certain that none of the commands of a perfectly good and merciful Being, can be mere arbitrary injunctions and impositions, without any good end : Much less can they have a contrary tendency. Of this we may be certain in general, even tho' we should not be able particularly to discern the benevolent design and tendency of some of God's revealed commands ; as, for example, some branches of the ceremonial law. There is no good reason to doubt, but that they were all wisely and kindly intended. And as to all the precepts of christianity without exception, One need not scruple to say positively, that the good end and tendency of them is easily and clearly discernable.

7. WE learn from hence, how liberal, ingenuous and chearful, as well as how universal an obedience they who believe in God, ought to yield to his commandments. Does it become us, my brethren, to obey Him with reluctance, and grutchingly, who is good to all, and all whose commandments are in their very nature kind and good, as if we were obeying a tyrant, or cruel task-master, who cared not what became of us, so that his own selfish ends were but answered ? If God governs us according to the rules of wisdom and benevolence, even as a father doth his children, only in an infinitely more gracious and perfect manner, should our obedience be gloomy, reluctant, servile and slavish, as if we only feared a *Bastile* and the *torture* ! How incongruous were this ! Such an obedience may be suitable enough for some nations to pay to the edicts of their tyrannical and cruel Monarchs ; but, surely, it is altogether unbecoming christians to their God, their Father in heaven ! Your obedience to Him ought to be, in the highest sense, liberal, chearful, filial, joyful. It becomes you, in other

other words, to be "followers of God as *dear children* ; and to walk in *love*, as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour."* This is the spirit of genuine christianity ; the design, tendency and fruit of the gospel. Whoever is *wholly* a stranger to this, does not yet "know the grace of God in truth," how often soever he may have read or heard the gospel. For says our Lord, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed : And ye shall know the truth, and the *truth shall make you free*—Ye shall be free indeed."†

8. All parents should copy after the goodness of God, our heavenly Father, in providing for, and governing their children. They are unnatural parents indeed, who do not love their own offspring : God is good and merciful to all his. But, as has been observed, God's goodness is not a blind fondness, or mere instinctive benevolence : It is inseparably connected with reason, and under the direction of wisdom in all its operations. Under a similar direction should the love and affections of all parents be. They ought to look forward to consequences, to consult the real good of their children, and pursue that as their object ; on one hand, by gratifying, as far as may be, all their reasonable desires, and on the other, by opposing such as are unreasonable, vicious and hurtful ; not indulging them in any wrong way ; not sparing reproof, or even correction, when that is really necessary to answer the benevolent end proposed. There are probably many more children hurt, and almost ruined, by the indiscrete kindness, and excessive indulgence, than by the too great rigor and severity of parents ; tho' examples of the latter may not be wanting—"Whom the Lord loveth

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* Eph. V. 1, 2.

† John viii. 31, 32, 36.

“ he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth ” And the following counsel, is that of a very tender father, as well as the wisest of men and Kings, I mean Solomon : “ Chasten thy son while there is hope ; and let not thy soul spare for his crying.”

9. FROM what has been said concerning the universal goodness of God, not only to mankind, but even to the inferior orders of creatures, it appears to be unreasonable and sinful, and contrary to true goodness, to exercise cruelty towards the animal creation. Those creatures which are adapted to human use, whether for labor, food, cloathing, or in any other way, we have indeed a right to use thus ; not from the mere light of nature, which gives no such right, but by the express grant of God ; whose are all the fowles of heaven, the fish of the sea, “ every beast of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.” (This was one, tho’ it is far from being the only end of their creation.) And, from those animals that are noxious and mischievous to us, we may doubtless defend ourselves even by destroying them, tho’ they should be of no use to us afterwards. But to kill or torture any of the brute-creation, merely for the sake of destroying or vexing them ; or even to use them with unnecessary rigor and severity in our service, cannot be justified upon the principles of reason and benevolence. Solomon says, “ a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.” There have doubtless been many and great *immoralities* committed by men, in abusing the creatures of God, even very inferior ones. There is also a degree of *impiety* therein. And cruelty to these animals, cannot but be offensive to Him that made them, their Lord and Proprietor as well as ours ; and whose “ tender mercies are over all his works.”

10. GOD being good and merciful to all men, none, not even the poorest, meanest and lowest of the human race, have any ground to complain of, or to murmur against Him and his providence: But, on the contrary, all have reason to be thankful for their being and preservation; especially when it is considered, that they will be immortally happy in another world, unless their own wickedness and perverseness should destroy them.

11. THE greatest and happiest men in this world, tho' they are under some peculiar obligations to gratitude, have yet no right, no cause, to despise the poor and low, or to glory in themselves. Either of these things, would be at once foolish and impious. He that constituted the members in the natural body, and assigned them their respective offices as pleased him; He that appointed the foot to tread in the dust, and to bear the load of the body; He that made the least comely parts and members, to answer valuable ends, and to participate in the happiness of the body; while He made the ear to hear, the eye to see, and the head to direct and govern the whole, has put an honor upon them all in their respective places: And neither of them can say to another, "I have no need of you." Thus it is also in the church, and in the greater society of mankind. For in both respects, we are "members one of another;" and each, *such a member* as the infinitely wise and good Author of the whole, pleased to make him. What ground is there then, for glorying or despising? For "what hast thou, O man, that thou didst not receive!"——

12. IT is at once the basest ingratitude, and the greatest folly, not to love and obey the blessed God; so good, merciful and tender a Father. O ungrate-
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ful and degenerate children of the most High ! For you are still his offspring, tho' you have forgotten your Father, and "lightly esteemed the rock of your salvation." In this respect wicked men are not less imprudent, than disingenuous. To disobey the holy, just and good commandments of God, which are in their very nature adapted to promote your happiness, is to bring mischief on yourselves. Such a conduct, if continued in, cannot but end in your ruin, even without the consideration of that future punishment, which God has expressly threatned as the reward of unrighteousness. There is no substantial happiness, but in God, in knowing and doing his will. They that are far from him, the fountain of light, life and joy,—that refuse to return to him, and to walk in his righteous ways, must needs perish.

13. WHAT great encouragement does the consideration of God's goodness afford to sinners, to confess and forsake their sins ? to "arise and go to their Father" ? Especially, what encouragement does this afford, when the goodness of God is considered as it is manifested in the gospel of Christ ; who appeared to "take away the sins of the world," and whose professed design in coming into it, was to "seek and to save that which was lost ?" Can you possibly doubt of a kind reception, or a gracious pardon from Him, who is not only in general declared to be good and merciful to all ; but who has "so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son" to save it ! Consider the parables of the prodigal son, of the *lost sheep*, and of the *lost piece of money*, in the gospel : They will all shew you, that it is not the will of your Father, that any of you should perish ; but that he "would have ALL men to be saved." The gospel makes no exception. It affords an adequate relief to all, and is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that

that believeth" *with all his heart*. The greatness of your past sins, will be no objection against your being accepted in Christ, if you come unto God by him. God expects no righteousness in or of you, in order to your being forgiven of Him ; but only a truly penitent and humble sense of your *unrighteousness*, and an hearty consent to receive "eternal life as his gift, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord."—"Ho, every One that thirsteth, [then] come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye—without money and without price—Incline your ear, (saith the Lord of life,) and come unto me : Hear, and your soul shall live."*— But,

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* Isai. LV. 1, 3. There is an expression in the learned Mr. CALVIN's commentary upon my text, which seems justly exceptionable, as conveying an idea contrary to what is most clearly revealed in the holy scriptures; and setting unwarrantable bounds to the grace, and pardoning mercy of God. Let the reader judge—"Quamvis ergo peccatorum remissio thesaurus sit *clausus* REPROBIS, non tamen Deum impedit ipsorum malitia et pravitas, quo minus in eos quoque bonitatem effundat Deus ; sed quam sine sensu devorant." In English—Altho', therefore, the remission of sins is a treasure *shut up* from the REPROBATE, yet their malice and wickedness does not prevent God's showering down goodness upon them also ; but which they devour without sense or consideration.

By the *reprobate*, the learned author had here meant only wicked and ungodly men, considered as such ; and if by the *remission of sins being a treasure shut up*, or closely locked with respect to them, he had intended no more, than that it was inaccessible or unattainable by them, *while hardened in their sins* ; this would have been quite unexceptionable, and perfectly agreeable to scripture. But the words naturally convey a different idea ; viz. That there are many persons who, by a supposed eternal *decree* of reprobation, are *absolutely* excluded from the benefit of pardon, or the grace of God revealed to the world. This was the known opinion

14. If, in reading the holy scriptures, we should find any representations or expressions relative to the divine conduct, which seem at first view to militate against the infinite goodness and mercy of God, we should not too readily admit them in that seemingly harsh sense : I mean, not till we have well examined them, compared them with other parts of scripture, and find that they will not bear any other construction without manifest force and violence. There is nothing so frequently and clearly declared in scripture, as the perfect, universal goodness and mercy of God. This is a doctrine infinitely precious and important, and to which we must always adhere, as our sheet-anchor, whatever becomes of any commonly-received opinions which interfere with it. To let some obscure expressions which seldom occur, lead in the interpretation of scripture, as if they were prime, fundamental articles ; instead of clear ones which occur almost in every page of the bible, is the most unnatural and preposterous thing in the world ; a common error, of the most pernicious consequence. This is more absurd than for the " blind to be leaders of the blind : " It is like the blind leading those that have their eyes open, and that see clearly—But, on the other hand, we ought to be very cautious lest we reject any doctrine really revealed in scripture, under

opinion of that learned man : A sentiment, at once unsupported by reason or scripture ; nay, contrary to both ; highly derogatory to the goodness and grace of God, and of dangerous tendency. Nor is it a little strange, that such a sentiment should be found in a commentary upon words, which so strongly express the universal goodness and tender mercies of God, as those of the text do : Especially considering the words immediately preceding,—viz, " The Lord is *gracious* and FULL of " *compassion*, slow to anger, and of great mercy." And it plainly appears that the learned man had these very words in his mind, when he wrote—" *Peccatorum remissio thesaurus est clausus REPROBIS !*"—Pardon, a treasure locked up against millions, in the decree of absolute reprobation !—

a false pretence that it contradicts the goodness of God, with which it is consistent. Our not well knowing how to reconcile it therewith, is no certain proof in all cases, that it is irreconcilable. For we must be vain indeed, or allow ourselves to be very imperfect and short-sighted creatures. However, it is not my intention here, to make a retreat into total darkness, or to resolve every thing into mystery, and human ignorance ; as if men were incapable judges of goodness, justice and mercy in any case : Which is the shameful method that many have taken to get over all difficulties, and to answer all objections against their unscriptural, absurd and blasphemous doctrines. We may be altogether as certain that some doctrines fathered upon the scriptures, are contrary to them, and inconsistent with mercy, goodness and justice, as we can possibly be, that any others are consonant to them ; or, indeed, that there is in nature any such thing as goodness, justice or mercy,

15. IF, therefore, my brethren, you know of any particular scheme or system of christianity (so called), two or three of the most distinguishing and leading principles of which, and the basis on which the whole rests, are plainly and certainly repugnant to the doctrine of God's universal goodness, and his tender mercies over all his works ; you may be certain that such scheme or system is false ;—absolutely and wholly false, so far as it has any connexion with, or dependence upon, those leading, fundamental & most distinguishing principles. Let me add, that if the fautors and asserters of such a supposed system, should cry it up as peculiarly the doctrine of evangelical grace, and as tending to give us exalted ideas of the goodness and mercy of God, in contradistinction to all other systems ; it would only make the matter so much the worse : It would be so much the more impious ;
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the greater abuse of the holy scriptures, and an insult upon the common sense of mankind. If you know of *no such scheme* as is here supposed, then be so kind as to let these remarks pass for nothing.— But if you do ; yet remember that human nature is frail and fallible ; and that men may have upright hearts, while they have very wrong and pernicious notions in their heads : So that there is an evident call for mutual candor, forbearance and charity, betwixt those that differ even widely in opinion ; that they may, if possible, “ keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

16. LET me, in the next place, caution wicked men against abusing the scripture-doctrine of God's goodness ; (for there is very little danger that any others will do so.) Do any imagine that they are safe in their evil courses, because God is good and merciful ? That were a vain imagination ; since those courses, in their own nature, tend to misery and ruin, as was intimated before. But, perhaps, you flatter yourselves, that however you may break God's commandments, yet He will not *punish* you in another world, if he is infinitely good and merciful ; but, at the worst, leave you to take the *natural* consequence of your evil doings. This would be an equally false and groundless inference ; tho' even that, would be ruinous and fatal. But God has established a moral government in the universe, as best adapted to promote his own glory, and the common felicity of his intelligent creatures. And such a kind of government, in its very nature, supposes that the obstinately wicked and impenitent under it, shall be *punished* by Him, as the Lord and Judge of all : And is it not declared, that at the great day, the wicked shall “ go away into everlasting *punishment*, “in the place” *prepared* for the devil and his angels !” In short, the certainty

of your punishment, if you persevere in breaking God's commandments, may be clearly infer'd from his goodness itself ; so far is that from being any sort of security to you ! Again : Do any of you rely upon the divine goodness and mercy, not in the practice of gross immoralities, but in the practice of your supposed duties, and moral virtues, while you reject the gospel of Christ, or that method of salvation which is revealed therein ? This is also a groundless presumption, unless you can plead a sinless innocence and perfection ; to which you will not pretend. What ! will you rely on the goodness and mercy of God, while you despise his truth sufficiently attested, and clearly proved to be such ?—while you tread under foot his Son from heaven, who came to redeem you ; and resist his Spirit ! To do thus, is actually renouncing that very goodness, and those tender mercies, on which you pretend to rely. Will you rely on the mercy of God, while you continue in that impenitence and unbelief, which God himself has declared shall terminate in ruin and perdition ? How absurd were this ! It is the greatest presumption and madness for any, to whom the gospel is preached, to rely on the mercy of God in any other way, course or practice, than that which God Himself has marked out. To depend upon it in any other way, is at once absurd & impious; this being, in effect, “making God a liar ;” and assuming to yourselves a right of prescribing to the Almighty, what channel his goodness and mercy shall flow in, even contrary to his own declared will and purpose !—Know, that the counsel of God shall stand ; and stand more immutable than the foundations of the earth, or the pillars of heaven, with whatever presumptuous hopes vain men may amuse and deceive themselves ! And if he that despised even Moses's law, died *without mercy*, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye !—But I forbear ;

bear ; remembering that inflicting terrible punishments, is spoken of in scripture as God's *strange work* ; and therefore, certainly, not be made the theme of *common declamation*, as it is by many. There would be a peculiar impropriety in insisting long upon it in a discourse on the goodness and tender mercies of God. But yet there seemed to be a necessity of saying something upon this point, by way of warning to wicked men, who so grossly abuse that very goodness on which they presume. Let the wicked therefore forsake his way, and return unto the Lord, that he may have mercy upon him ; and to our God, for he will then abundantly pardon, thro' Jesus Christ ; whom he hath " set forth to be a propitiation, thro' faith in his " blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission " of sins that are past, thro' the forbearance of God."

17. WHAT solid ground have those that love God, and sincerely do his commandments, for hope, and intire confidence in him ? Is it possible for you, my brethren, who do thus, to doubt of his love to you ?—What ! a sincere believer in Jesus Christ, and the promises of the gospel,—a truly good man, doubt the love and care of Him, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works ?—of Him, who is good even to the evil and unthankful ! This is a kind of paradox : But yet it is not an absolute impossibility. And if you should, in any measure, distrust the particular kindness and love of God to you, let the following passages in our Saviour's discourses, inspire you with a firm, and truly filial confidence in Him—" Behold the fowles of the air ; " for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather " into barns : Yet your heavenly Father feedeth " them. Are not ye *much better than they* ?" * And again : " Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings ? " and *not one of them* is forgotten before God. But " the

"the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear
 "not therefore; ye are of more value than many
 "SPARROWS."*

18. THE consideration of God's goodness and mercy, particularly as manifested in the holy scriptures, in the redemption of the world by Christ, naturally suggests very pleasing hopes, and a glorious prospect, with reference to the conclusion, or final result of that most wonderful interposition of grace. It cannot be denied, that ever since the apostacy of our first parents, there have been, and still are, some things of a dark and gloomy appearance, when considered by themselves.—So much folly, superstition and wickedness there is, "in this present evil world!"—But when we consider the declared end of Christ's manifestation in the flesh,—to give his life a ransom for all, and to destroy the works of the devil: When we consider the numerous prophecies respecting the destruction of sin and death, and the future glory of Christ's kingdom ON EARTH: When we consider, that he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet, the last of which is DEATH; and till he hath subdued ALL THINGS unto himself: When we reflect, that according to the apostle Paul, where sin has abounded, grace does much more abound; and that the same creature [or creation] which was originally made subject to vanity, is to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God: When we consider the parallel which is instituted and carried on by the same apostle, betwixt the first and second Adam, in his epistle to the Romans; and his express assertion in another, that "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive; but every man in his own order:"* In a word, when we duly consider that there is a certain "restitution of ALL

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"THINGS,

* Luke Chap. XII.

† 1 Cor. XV. 22, 23.

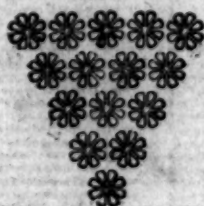
“THINGS, spoken of by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began :” When we duly consider these things, I say, light and comfort arise out of darkness and sorrow. And we may, without the least presumption, conclude in general that, in the revolution of ages, something far more grand, important and glorious than any thing which is vulgarly imagined, shall actually be the result of Christ’s coming down from heaven to die on a cross, of his resurrection from the dead, and of his being crowned with glory and honor, as Lord both of the *dead* and of the *living*.—The word of God, and his mercy, endure for ever : Nor will he leave any thing which is truly his own work, unfinished.—“As the heavens
“are higher than the earth,” saith the Lord, “so are
“my ways higher than your ways ; and my thoughts
“than your thoughts—My word—that goeth forth
“out of my mouth—shall not return unto me void,
“but it shall accomplish that which I please ; and it
“shall prosper in the thing whereof I sent it.”*

To conclude then : Let us all, young men and maidens, old men and children, love and honor, extol and obey the God and Father of all, whose tender mercies are over all his works ; and who has been so gracious and bountiful to ourselves in particular. If we sincerely do thus, as becometh the children of the Highest, we shall, in due time, partake of his goodness in a far more glorious manner & measure, than we can in the earthly house of this tabernacle. We shall doubtless also have a far more clear, distinct and perfect knowledge, than we can possibly have at present, of what is intended in some apparently grand and sublime, and yet difficult passages in the sacred oracles ; particularly that of John the Divine, with which I close : “AND EVERY CREATURE which

" is in HEAVEN, and on the EARTH, and UNDER
 " THE EARTH, and such as are in the SEA, and ALL
 " THAT ARE IN THEM, heard I saying, Blessing, and
 " honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that
 " sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for
 " ever and ever." * AMEN !

* Rev. V. 13.

THE END.



PSALM XL. 9—11.

IN full Assemblies I have told
 Thy Truth and Righteousness at large :
 Nor did, Thou know'st, my Lips with-hold
 From uttering what thou gav'st in Charge ;
 Nor kept within my Breast confin'd,
 Thy Faithfulness, and saving Grace ;
 But preach'd thy Love, for all design'd
 That all might That, and Truth embrace.
 Then let those Mercies I declar'd
 To others, Lord, extend to me :
 Thy loving Kindness my Reward,
 Thy Truth my safe Protection be !

CORRECTIONS.

Page	Line	From	Read
27	15	bottom	worlds
34	7	bot.	will take
40	—	margin	LUKE
43	—	margin	Psalms CXI.
45	3	top	than those
48	5	top	of reason,
87	11	bottom	being, in effect,
88	2	bot.	again

N. B. Some less material errors are omitted.

